

Rolling Stone

Issue 766 September 2015
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JEFF BUCKLEY

'GRACE' TURNS 21

INSIDE THE MAKING
OF A CLASSIC

FOALS RETURN

THE DOWNFALL OF SUGE KNIGHT

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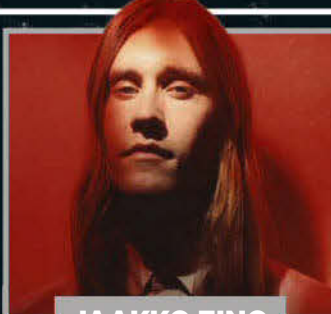
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ON THE COVER Jeff Buckley photographed by Merri Cyr.



PEGGY SIROTA

Rush: Neil Peart,
Geddy Lee and Alex
Lifeson (from left),
photographed in
Los Angeles, April
2015. Page 48



CORRESPONDENCE

LOVE LETTERS & ADVICE



Taming the Beast

SO U.S. ROLLING STONE gets reality TV idiot Kim Kardashian's heaving boobs on the cover and we get Kevin Parker gazing dreamily into the distance? Thanks ROLLING STONE! I'll take the delightful Kev over that no-talent skank any day!

Bronwyn Ellis,
Cargo, NSW

TAME IMPALA'S NEW RECORD is a revelation. After getting used to the absence of guitar riffs, I've come to love *Currents*. Listening to it with headphones makes you feel like you're drifting in an isolation tank, which if you haven't tried before, you should – it's a mind-bending experience, much like Kevin Parker's trip of a record.

David Branigan,
Melbourne, Vic

Sister Act

AS A DEDICATED READER with a vagina, the last issue of ROLLING STONE was a step in the right direction. Meaty features on the brilliant *Orange Is the New Black* (the only strong all-female cast on TV – no, the *Real Housewives of Melbourne* doesn't count) and kick-ass UFC fighter Ronda Rousey in the same issue? Keep this up and I just might have to take out an annual subscription.

Gabby Priest,
Daylesford, VIC

Doco Doldrums

AFTER READING ABOUT *Kurt Cobain: Montage Of Heck* and *Amy* (the Amy Winehouse doco) in recent issues of ROLLING STONE (*Montage* on DVD, *Amy* at the cinema), I feel shattered. How could two so depressing movies about such creative, beautiful yet tragic figures get released so close to each other? It's enough to send any happy chick to drink (just kidding)!

Belinda Oaks,
Redfern, NSW

"Brian Wilson looks like a big, grey-haired baby. I hope I'm like that when I'm his age."

Beach Babe

READING JASON FINE'S interview with Brian Wilson in the latest issue, it struck me that staying young-at-heart really does make you look young on the outside as well. Brian Wilson looks like a big, grey-haired baby, and I put it down to him just having a positive mental attitude and a love and understanding for other people. What a dead-set legend. I hope I'm like that when I'm his age.

Ben Harrigan,
Brisbane, QLD

Violent Snub?

SO VIOLENT FEMMES, THE band that's soundtracked every adolescent's sex angst since 1983, announce a new album and only get a measly column in news? Pah!

Glenn Dunning,
Kyneton, Vic

Muscle Man

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO Jesse Malin these days? He looks like he's on steroids!

Kate Fitton,
Kempsey, NSW

WRITE TO US AND WIN



Thanks to Warner Music, every letter published will win a copy of Disturbed's new CD *Immortalized* (valued at \$19.99). Write to us and tell us your thoughts on the magazine or life in general. But please, keep it brief!

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ROLLING STONE AUSTRALIA

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF & PUBLISHER: Mathew Coyte
EDITOR: Rod Yates

ART DIRECTOR: Cameron Emerson-Elliott

CONTRIBUTORS: Michael Adams, Luke Anisimoff, Jaymz Clements, Toby Creswell, Barry Divola, Robyn Doreian, Michael Dwyer, Samuel J. Fell, Dan Findlay, Ed Gibbs, James Jennings, Dan Lander, Darren Levin, Daniel Murphy, Matt Reekie, Henry Rollins, Barnaby Smith, Marcus Teague, Jason Treuen, Jenny Valentish, Doug Wallen, Ian Winwood

PHOTOGRAPHERS: Steve Baccon, Dane Beesley, Damian Bennett, Daniel Boud, Stephen Booth, Adrian Cook, Max Doyle, Kelly Rose Hammond, Kane Hibberd, Rod Hunt, Stephen Langdon, Joshua Morris, Tony Mott, Martin Philbey, Wilk, Katie Kaars
ILLUSTRATORS: Diego Patiño, WeBuyYourKids, Adi Firth, Andrew Joyner, Sonia Kretschmar, Leo Coyte, Andria Innocent, Anwen Keeling, Eamon Donnelly, Matt Huynh, James Fosdike, Michael Weldon

ADVERTISING, SPONSORSHIP

& EVENTS MANAGER:

Amy Gates: agates@rollingstoneaus.com

PRODUCTION CONTROLLER: Giovanna Javelosa

AD PRODUCTION CO-ORDINATOR:

Roy, Dominic (02) 9282 8691

BRAND MANAGER: Brony Popp

CIRCULATION MANAGER: Charlotte Gray

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ROLLING STONE USA

EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Jann S. Wenner

MANAGING EDITOR: Will Dana

DEPUTY MANAGING EDITOR: Nathan Brackett

ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITORS: Sean Woods

SENIOR WRITERS: David Fricke, Brian Hiatt,

Peter Travers

SENIOR EDITOR: Christian Hoard

DESIGN DIRECTOR: Joseph Hutchinson

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Jodi Peckman

EDITOR AT LARGE: Jason Fine

VICE PRESIDENT & CFO: Timothy Walsh

CHIEF REVENUE OFFICER: David Kang

HEAD OF DIGITAL: Gus Wenner

PUBLISHER: Michael H. Probus

MANUFACTURING DIRECTOR: John Dragonetti

LICENSING & BUSINESS AFFAIRS:

Maureen A. Lamberti (Executive Director),

Aimee Schecter (Director), Kathleen Taylor

(Coordinator)

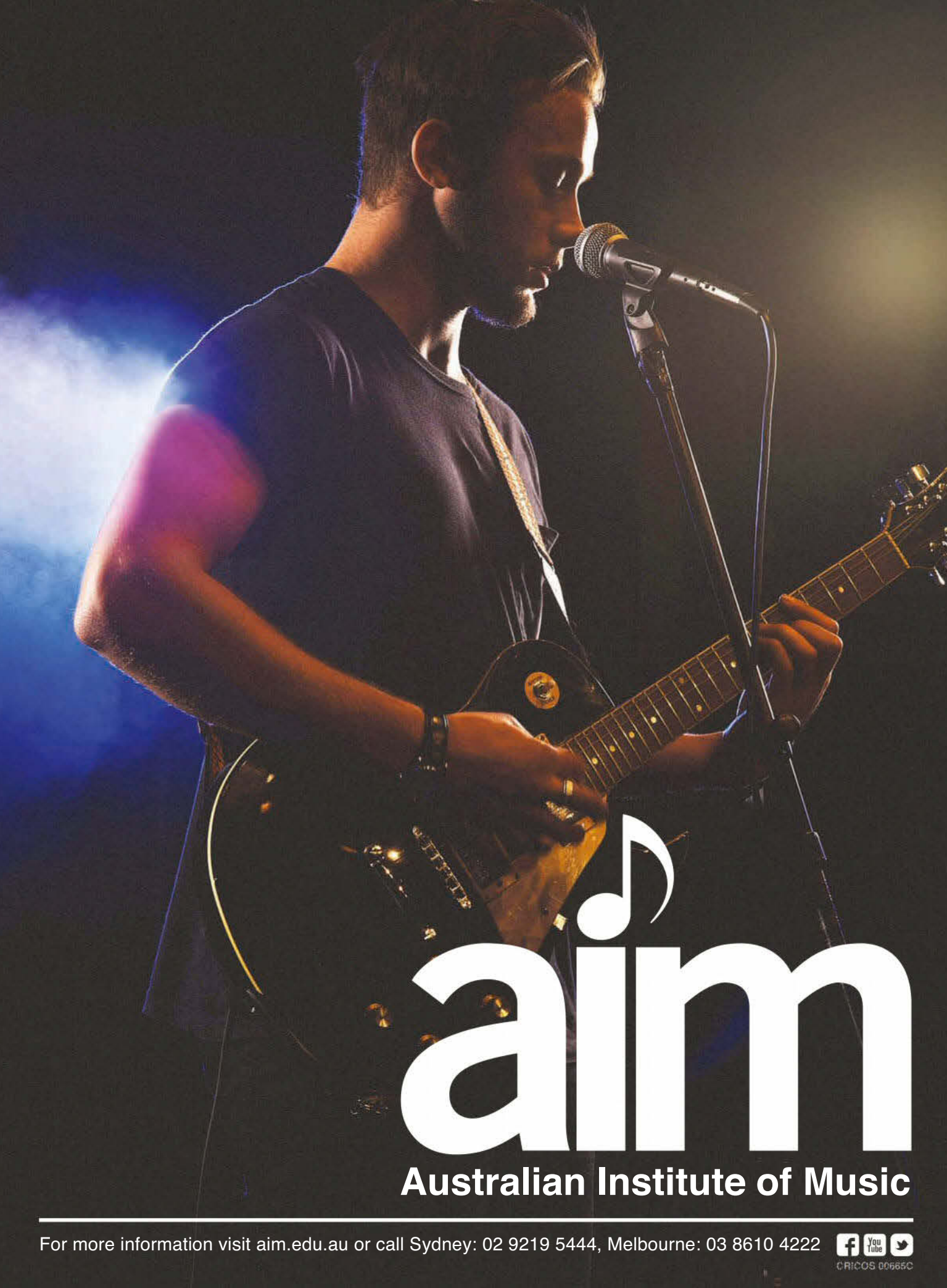
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RALPH J. GLEASON 1917-1975
HUNTER S. THOMPSON 1937-2005

A full-page photograph of a male musician with a beard, wearing a dark t-shirt, playing a black electric guitar and singing into a microphone. The scene is lit with dramatic stage lights, including a bright blue light on the left and a warm orange light on the right. The musician is in profile, facing right.

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WRAP-UP

SPLENDOUR IN THE GRASS YOUR BACK- STAGE PASS

We hit Splendour en masse this year to bring you live reviews of your favourite acts, on-ground interviews (in video, audio and text formats) and behind-the-scenes video and photos from our time backstage. So if you couldn't be there, or if you want to see what happens behind the hessian screened-off areas, we've got you covered!



EXCLUSIVE

INTERVIEW FATHER JOHN MISTY

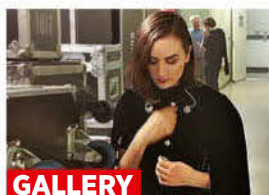
In a web exclusive, we talk to Josh Tillman about his upcoming Aussie tour, and how he learned to stop antagonising his live audience.



VIDEO

LIVE AT THE RS OFFICE HOLY HOLY

Aussie dream-pop/indie duo Holy Holy drop in to our office to play a couple of tracks from their new *When the Storms Would Come* LP.



GALLERY

ON TOUR WITH D'ANGELO MEG MAC

We follow the buzz-worthy Melbourne songstress as she criss-crosses the U.S. with soul legend D'Angelo. Talk about a baptism of fire!



FLASHBACK

READY FOR WOO HOO: BLUR

Our 1997 cover story by Michael Dwyer, as Britain's prettiest alt-boy-band change the formula and get set to dance on Brit-pop's Grave.



Lana
Del Rey

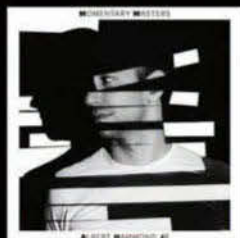
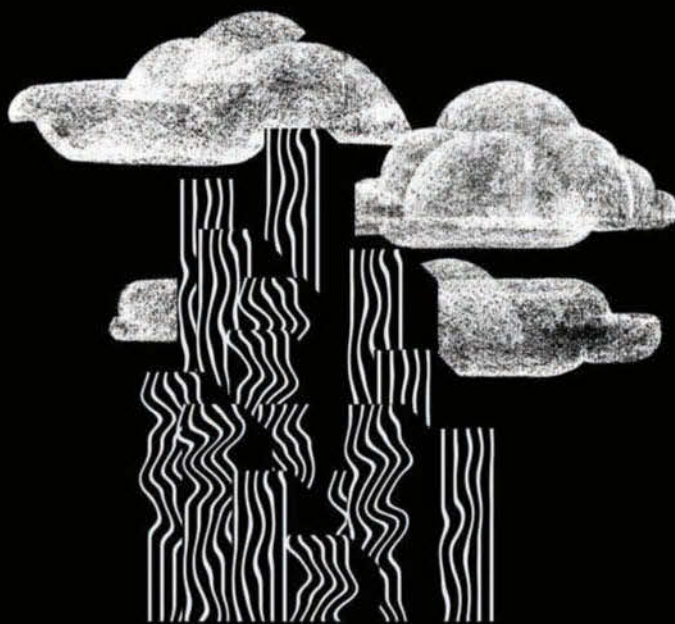
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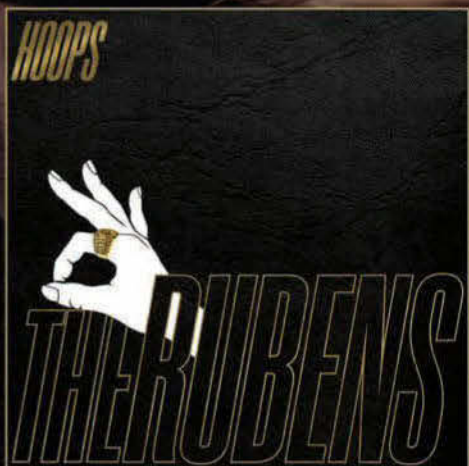


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"Imagine if da Vinci was asked not to think of anything except what he first became famous for." —Kanye West

Rolling Stone Notes



Monkey Wrench Hits Fools!

Dave Grohl was sprinting across the stage at Sweden's Ullevi Stadium during "Monkey Wrench" when he took a 12-foot tumble. "I definitely shredded something!" he said. After cancelling European dates the Foo resumed their U.S. tour, with Grohl resplendent on his own *Game Of Thrones*-inspired throne. Thoughts are also turning to a new LP, which likely will be another concept album. "It's not enough to just make a fucking record anymore," said drummer Taylor Hawkins.



RUBY TUESDAY

Not content with winning over the U.S. in *O/TNB*, Ruby Rose hit the decks at Pacha in New York.



ROLE MODEL

Cara Delevingne pulled some decidedly un-photogenic facials while appearing in Madrid on *El Hormiguero*, a Spanish variety TV show, while promoting her new film, *Paper Towns*. We still love you, Cara.



Rock Royalty Team Up For Jam

The Boss joined Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys on stage for "Barbara Ann" and "Surfin' USA" at a recent show in New Jersey. Here they are chillin' backstage with Blondie Chaplin pre-show.

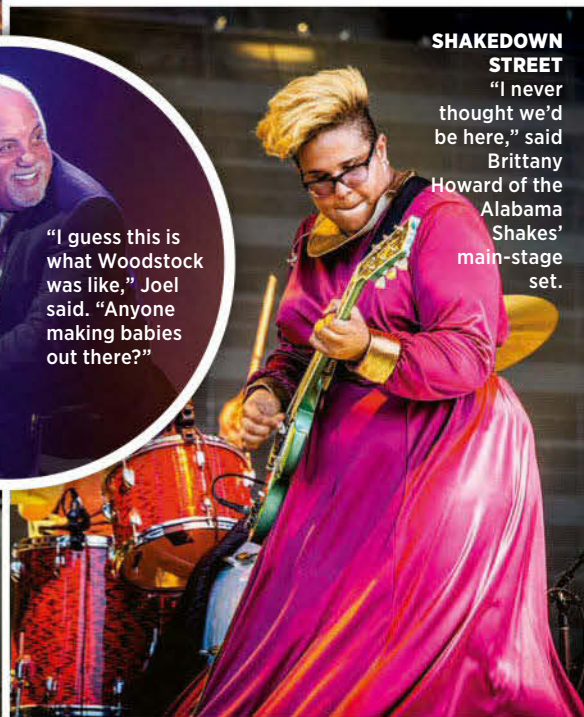
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: C.F. L'ANIGAN/WIREIMAGE; NOAM GALAI/GETTY IMAGES; BRIAN WILSON/INSTAGRAM; JUAN NAHARRO GIMENEZ/GETTY IMAGES



"I guess this is what Woodstock was like," Joel said. "Anyone making babies out there?"

SHAKEDOWN STREET

"I never thought we'd be here," said Brittany Howard of the Alabama Shakes' main-stage set.



Bonnaroo: Extra-Hot!

Few festivals test the limits of its crowd more than Bonnaroo, with 80,000 fans camping out in the sweltering Tennessee heat. It was worth it, with sets by Billy Joel, Kendrick Lamar, and Florence + the Machine. Singer Florence Welch (above) is on the road to recovery from her recent broken foot – take heart, Dave Grohl – venturing into the pit several times. "It's so hot out there," she said. "Is everybody drinking?"



CAN'T STOP THE WAFFLE

In Atlanta, Kanye and Outkast visited Waffle House. "Kanye got a chocolate-chip waffle and chicken sandwich," says manager Vincent Burr. "They tipped real nice!"

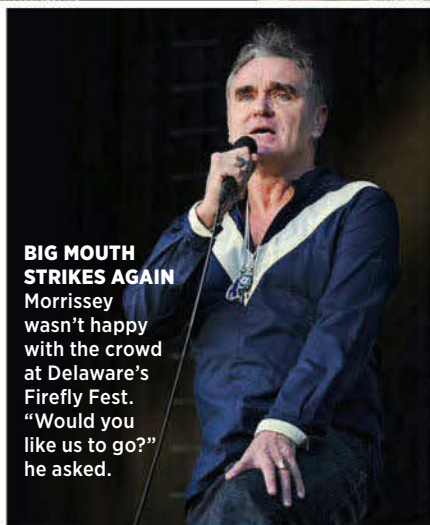
BEST FRIENDS FOREVER

Taylor Swift welcomed good buddy Lorde onstage in Washington on July 13.



BIG MOUTH STRIKES AGAIN

Morrissey wasn't happy with the crowd at Delaware's Firefly Fest. "Would you like us to go?" he asked.



SPEEDWAY FLASHBACK?

You'd think the Stones would steer clear of Speedway shows after Altamont. Fortunately their Indianapolis Motor Speedway show went off without a hitch.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GRIFFIN LOTZ; JASON MERRITT/GETTY IMAGES; GRIFFIN LOTZ; MICHAEL HICKEY/GETTY IMAGES; KRIS CONNOR/LP5/GETTY IMAGES FOR TAS; ILVA S. SAVENKO/GETTY IMAGES FOR FIREFLY; BIG BO/INSTAGRAM

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Rock & Roll

Foals Get 'Down'

British rockers waste no time releasing follow-up to 'Holy Fire'

By Craig Mathieson

THERE'S A SIMPLE REASON why Foals have returned with their fourth album, the seething *What Went Down*, so soon after the extensive touring for their breakthrough record, 2013's *Holy Fire*, had concluded. "We felt charged," declares the English rock group's frontman, Yannis Philippakis. "The last few shows for *Holy Fire* were some of the best we'd ever played and we wanted to capitalise on that energy."

Stepping out of a London rehearsal room where the new compositions are being prepared for a return to the road, Philippakis is quietly enthusiastic about the finished album but still trying to get his head around the dizzying creative burst that birthed *What Went Down* (out August 28th).

"The momentum was there and we basically wrote the entire record in three months," explains the 29-year-old singer and guitarist. "There's this restlessness and desire within [Cont. on 14]"

CREATIVE
BURST
Philippakis
onstage last
year

FOALS

[Cont. from 13] the band to put more music out. We're increasingly aware that time is of the essence and that there's no need to marinate on one album for three years. We've done that and the result was no better – the first expression of a song, and the first take, is the best."

Dense but keenly focused, *What Went Down* leaps from one idea to the next, but the individual execution is powerfully capable. The swirling thump of "Give it All" is contrasted by the building guitar charge of "Mountain at My Gates", while the treated drum patterns of "Snake Oil" give way to the closing sci-fi cataclysm of "A Knife in the Ocean".

Recorded in a French village in February of this year with producer James Ford (Arctic Monkeys), the record is both the heaviest set Foals have created and the most diverse. When the group first started coming together in Oxford in 2005, Philippakis says they were defined by self-imposed rules, culminating in 2008's stylistically narrow debut, *Antidotes*. After that, however, they were set on breaking those rules, an outlook that's only grown stronger since.

"Some guitar bands get trapped in this idea of what they should be, and every song reinforces that," he notes. "With us there's this fear that if we stand still we'll be overcome."

Philippakis says the growing profile of Foals – *Holy Fire* topped the Australian charts and reached number two in Britain – has been "surprising in a pleasant way", but success hasn't translated into celebrity.

"At the point when we might have been seduced by the superficial side, we were still living out of the way in Oxford," he says. "Living there meant we stayed grounded, and now that some of us are in London we're hardly dating models and hanging out at the 'it' spot."

There's currently not a great deal in British guitar music that impresses Philippakis, and his feeling is that bands calcify if they find themselves growing too comfortable. Having just penned an album where the restless, demanding lyrics "capture the essence of what's going on in my brain", the frontman isn't concerned that Foals will suffer the same fate.

"Behind every record of ours is a feeling that the best is yet to come and that we're chasing those moments when something connects in a way that hasn't happened before," declares Philippakis. "That's our motor. There's more to say and there are better shows to play." 



JOURNEYMEN
Tim Carroll (left) and
Oscar Dawson

The Long Road to Holy Holy's Debut LP

More than a decade after meeting, local two-piece release their first full-length

AMONGST THE TEXTURAL AND atmospheric pastoral rock of Holy Holy's debut album, *When the Storms Would Come*, is a song called "The Crowd". Though musically it doesn't stray far from the duo's lush sonic blueprint, lyrically it takes a few steps into uncharted territory. "It's about having dreams and feeling horrified by what your own mind can manufacture," explains vocalist Tim Carroll from Sweden, where he and his wife are visiting her family. "My girlfriend at the time was having dreams of strangling and stabbing people to death, and everybody has dreams about fucking various people they shouldn't be. I had this vivid dream about a zombie apocalypse, and so I just pushed those different concepts together into the song."

It's a surprisingly visceral lyric for an album that, elsewhere, deals in more tried and true themes of emotional turmoil. But then nothing about Holy Holy is overly typical. Take their formation: Carroll first met guitarist Oscar Dawson in 2003 when they were teaching English in Thailand. At that point music wasn't really a concern

for the singer, though he had a guitar, and he and Dawson would sit and play when the work day was over.

Fast forward to 2011 and Carroll was living in Stockholm and Dawson had relocated to Berlin with his then-band, Dukes of Windsor. After Dawson took a trip to visit Carroll they started trading song ideas; over the next few months they swapped more and nuded them out during short stays with each other. By 2013, with the duo back in Australia (Carroll in Brisbane; Dawson in Melbourne),

they'd become Holy Holy and released their first single, "Impossible Like You". With management in place and a song on the airwaves came tours with acts such as Boy & Bear, Ball Park Music and, earlier this

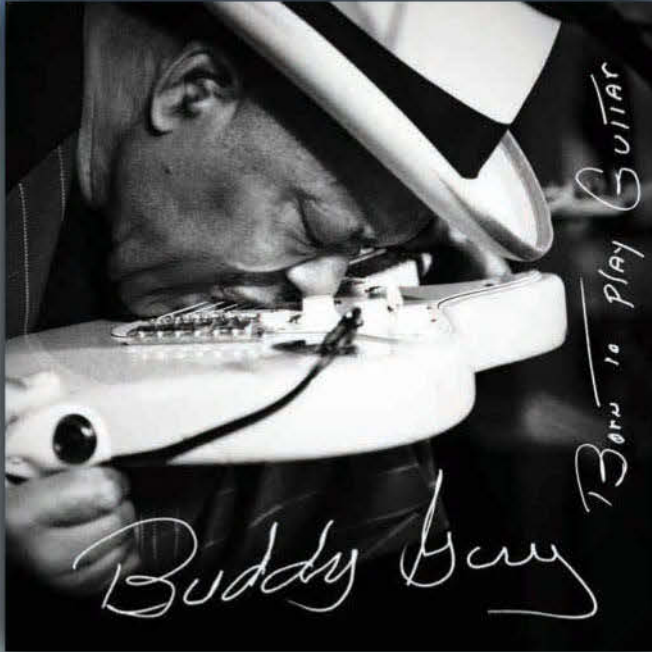
year, festivals such as Primavera in Barcelona, accompanied by glowing notices from overseas magazines such as *NME*. All of which makes a very nice launch pad for their debut album, which was recorded intermittently over a three-year period with producer Matt Redlich.

"When we played at Primavera it was about 8pm, the sun was going down and there was a crowd watching, and the Mediterranean was literally right there," recalls Dawson. "Knowing that playing in a band's taken you there . . . that was pretty cool. And weird."

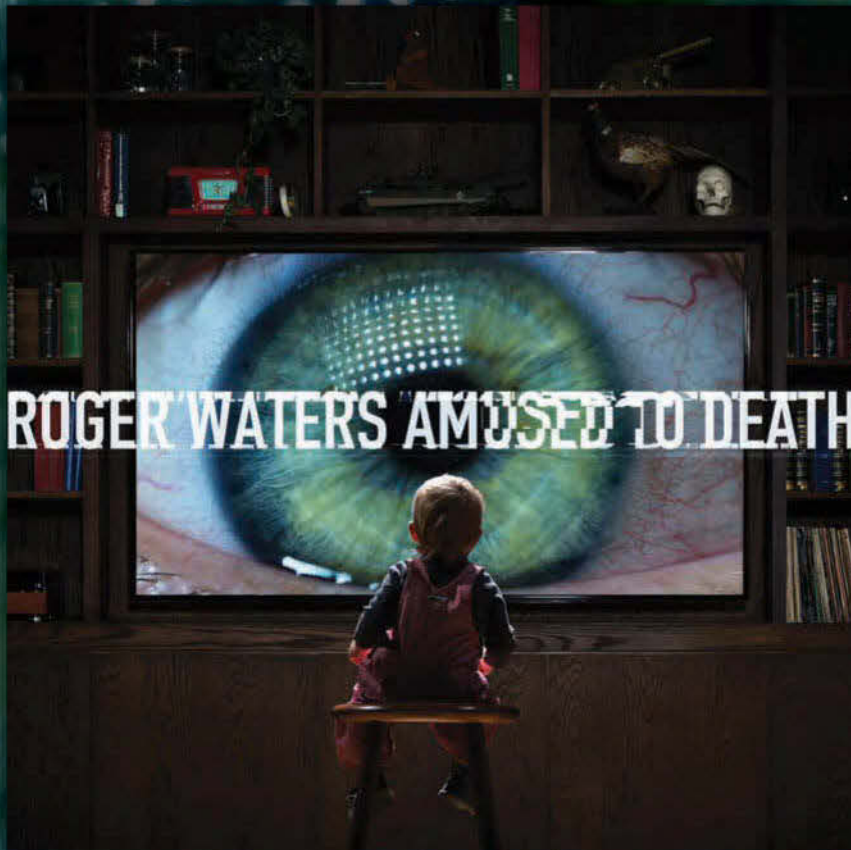
ROD YATES

"I had this vivid dream about a zombie apocalypse."

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Disclosure Double Their Fun

The U.K. brothers aim high on their second LP, featuring Sam Smith and Lorde

EARLIER THIS YEAR, DISCLOSURE reunited with an old friend. As the English dance-music duo neared the finish line of their second LP, *Caracal* (due out September 25th), they invited singer Sam Smith to come by their new studio in London's St. John's Wood neighbourhood. "It was really exciting," says Howard Lawrence, sitting next to his older brother and bandmate Guy. "We had three whole days to hang out with Sam and write, which are two of my favourite things to do."

In the years since Smith sang on "Latch", Disclosure's triple-platinum breakthrough smash, both acts have rocketed to stardom. You can hear how that journey has changed both of them on "Omen", the song they made together for *Caracal* – a sleek, blissed-out anthem that might be the happiest-sounding track either artist has ever released. "He's definitely not lonely now," Howard says of Smith with a laugh.

Another highlight from the new LP, tentatively titled "Magnets", was co-written and sung by Lorde. "She turned up on her own, no management or bodyguard," says



FULL DISCLOSURE
Howard (left) and Guy Lawrence

Howard. "That's the most equal collaboration on the record. You can really hear her sound – this sassy yet vulnerable thing."

They feel that the LP represents a new turn in their songwriting. "There's not really any club music on this one," says Guy. "It's club-influenced, but every song is a fully structured pop song." Soon, Disclosure will launch their biggest U.S. tour

yet, including a headlining date at Madison Square Garden – a major milestone for the Lawrence brothers, who grew up idolising arena-scale prog-rock bands like Rush and Genesis. "My dad gave me a VHS of Led Zeppelin playing there when I was about three, and I used to play drums along to it," Guy says. "So that's definitely going to be special." **SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON**

HBO MADE THE EDM STAR: ACTORS-TURNED-DJS

TV made them famous. Now they're giving dance music a shot. So, how well do they rock a party?



Austin 'Chumlee' Russell

Best known as: Co-host of the

History Channel show *Pawn Stars*, where his goofball comic charm has made him a breakout star.

Years DJ'ing: Since early 2015
How's it going? After taking lessons at a "DJ institute" called Blend and practicing "for, like, a month straight", Chumlee made his debut in February at Vegas' Ghostbar Dayclub; his rider for the show requested five Nerf guns, Girl Scout cookies and "beautiful waitresses to take me to the stage".



Kristian Nairn

Best known as: Hodor, the lovable gentle giant on *Game of Thrones*.

Years DJ'ing: 12
How's it going? Nairn, who grew up in Northern Ireland, was a fixture on the Belfast DJ scene years before he started acting. "I'm shooting emotional laser beams out into the crowd," he's said of his DJ sets. Recently, Nairn embarked on the Rave of Thrones Tour, which promised "the deepest house from all seven kingdoms" and asked attendees to show up in *GoT*-themed costumes.



Nick Hogan

Best known as: The son of WWE legend Hulk Hogan and co-star of the late-'00s reality-TV show *Hogan Knows Best*.

Years DJ'ing: 5
How's it going? Hogan was training to follow in his father's legendary footsteps and get in the ring, but a shoulder injury eventually pushed him into DJ'ing. In 2014, he released the single "Everybody's Doing It". A video for the song shows footage of people partying during DJ sets at Hogan's Beach, a Tampa Bay club and seafood restaurant owned by his family.



RJ Mitte

Best known as: The award-winning actor who portrayed Walt Jr., Walter White's disabled son on *Breaking Bad*.

Years DJ'ing: "The last little bit"
How's it going? Mitte debuted on the decks with this year's five-city Breaking Beats Tour, playing a set that ranged from deep house to hip-hop. Though he has admitted he's "not a professional", he said, "I can match up beats fairly decently." Mitte isn't the first *Breaking Bad* alum to break a beat; in 2013, actor Aaron Paul released a house anthem called "Dance Bitch".

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Coopers

The Great American Internet Novel Is Here

Joshua Cohen's 'Book of Numbers' is a fascinating look at the dark heart of the Web

THE MAN WHO JUST PUBLISHED one of the best novels ever written about the Internet has spent less time online than almost anyone else his age. After graduating from college in 2001, Joshua Cohen lived in Eastern Europe for six years, writing fiction, filing overseas dispatches for *The*

Numbers, about a failed novelist-turned-ghostwriter named Joshua Cohen who's working on the memoirs of *another* Joshua Cohen, the founder of a Google-like company called Tetration. (Cohen himself worked as a ghostwriter for two Holocaust survivors.)

The novel wears its postmodernism lightly. It's a page turner about life under the veil of digital surveillance, complete with a plotline about Tetration helping the government spy on citizens. Cohen came up with that idea even before Edward Snowden made headlines. If WikiLeaks allowed citizens to see what the government was up to, Cohen reasoned, the government can also see everything we do. "It's a law of the Internet," Cohen says. "Transparency cuts both ways."

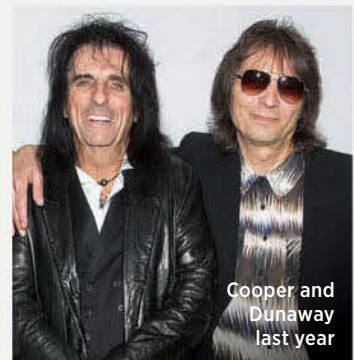
For the Tetration founder, who's referred to as "Principal" by his ghostwriter, Cohen invented a frequently hilarious voice full of Web-friendly slang: "msg", "brogrammer", "algy" for algorithm. "I took a little piece of Jobs, took a little piece of Bezos, took a little piece of Zuckerberg," Cohen says.

With a signature pair of thin-rimmed round glasses and a tendency to speak in numerically ordered bullet points, Cohen sometimes comes off like a particularly devout tech CEO, despite a pedigree that would suggest anything but. He grew up in Atlantic City and got a degree in composition from the Manhattan School of Music

before heading abroad. Cohen's early fiction touched on creative frustration and religious conflict, as well as his dark view of the Web: In one short story, a journalist investigates the lives of his favourite porn stars, only to discover they're somehow less real in person than onscreen.

At its heart, *Book of Numbers* is an attempt to reclaim a sense of humanity in the digital age, as the Internet becomes less an anonymous playground and more a tool for the surveillance state. "We're still the generation that realises that it's a transition," he says. "The next doesn't even think it's a change."

KYLE CHAYKA



Cooper and Dunaway last year

HIGH TIMES WITH ALICE COOPER

Dennis Dunaway – bassist for the Alice Cooper band from 1968 until Cooper became a solo act in 1975 – has collected his wildest tales for a new memoir, *Snakes! Guillotines! Electric Chairs! My Adventures in the Alice Cooper Group*, written with ROLLING STONE contributor Chris Hodenfield. Here are five things we learned.

Early on, the band's management team paid the bills by selling Dylan bootlegs.

Cooper's managers allegedly got the tapes through a source at Columbia Records and sold them to record stores as the band toured. "They had carloads of them," writes Dunaway.

Cooper's famous boa constrictor fell into his lap – almost literally.

The snake, featured with Alice on the cover of ROLLING STONE in 1972, became a signature after a fan threw it onstage one night.

Salvador Dalí was a fan.

The artist spent time with the group in order to create a 360-degree hologram of Cooper. "With the tips of his mustache curled and his giraffe-hide vest... he was every bit as surrealistic as his paintings," writes Dunaway.

The bandmates thought Kiss ripped them off.

"Just as we had borrowed elements from our hero bands," writes Dunaway, "now it was happening to us – the makeup, the glitter, the theatrics."

Dunaway still isn't sure why the original group broke up in 1975.

"Friends... suggested that reducing the size of the band also reduced the number of profit splits," he writes. "One day I was a rock star. The next day I was uninvited. Boom. Deal out. Gone."

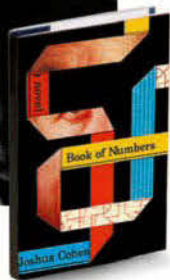
ANDY GREENE



THE FOSTER WALLACE OF RED HOOK
Joshua Cohen as he appears IRL

Jewish Daily Forward and generally avoiding the Web – he didn't even have a dial-up connection. When Cohen returned to New York in 2007, everyone suddenly had smartphones and Facebook accounts. He found the Web's unrelenting creep so unnerving that he considered going back to Europe. "I realised I didn't have enough money to buy a ticket," says Cohen, 34, drinking whiskey and smoking cigarettes at a bar near his home in Red Hook, Brooklyn, one recent afternoon, "and I had shipped all my stuff home on a boat."

Cohen still avoids social media, and his wariness of the Web suffuses *Book of*



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PRESENTS

FIVE NOTES

The Rubens

BEER-SOAKED SECOND ALBUM FROM NEW SOUTH WALES BAND OF BROTHERS

1 Back to the beach

Originally from Menangle in country New South Wales, the band – brothers Sam, Zaac and Elliott Margin, Scott Baldwin and Will Zeglis – headed to the nearby beach suburb of Coledale to write their second album, *Hoops*. “It’s a beautiful place – north of Wollongong, south of Sydney,” frontman Sam Margin explains. “We had this old fibro shack. It was just the change of scenery that we needed.”

2 Writing isn’t the only thing they did...

“When we all get together we drink a shitload of beer,” says Margin, laughing. “It gets really messy, literally . . . We were going through two recycling bins worth of bottles and we were like, ‘Man, we gotta sort this out!’” They even invited American tour buddies Grouplove to the party. “They came down to the beach house for the day, we had a big barbecue and went for a surf.”

3 He doesn’t remember writing one of the songs

Margin discovered “Switchblade” – the album’s lighters-in-the-air moment – on his laptop the morning after a boozy writing session. “I had to decode my drunk lyrics and write a chorus to fit,” he says. “I don’t think drinking is conducive to writing, but it worked for that one.” Other tracks deal with the negative effects of hitting the bottle too hard. “There’s a quintessential Australian drinking culture where we come from.”

4 David Kahne was the man for the job again

The L.A. producer (the Strokes, Lana Del Rey) personally invited the Rubens to New York to record their 2012 self-titled debut. But it was a more self-assured act he encountered three years on. “This time we went in there with a bit more balls,” says Margin. “We knew we weren’t going to budge on certain things.”

5 ‘Hoops’ has nothing to do with basketball

The title track – an 11th hour addition – alludes to the difficulties of “getting a record made”. It’s a beat-driven, hip-hop flavoured track in the vein of their 2012 hit “My Gun”. First single “Hallelujah” is another number that started from a drum sample. Despite the cynical undertones, it’s not an anti-religion song. “It’s anti the wrong people promoting religion,” explains the singer.

DARREN LEVIN



SOUL BROTHERS
The Rubens (Sam
Margin, centre)

Don Henley's Country-Rock Homecoming

For his first solo LP in 15 years, the Eagle recorded in Nashville with Jagger, Haggard and more

WHEN DON HENLEY WAS A BOY growing up in rural Texas, he used to listen to country greats like Hank Williams and George Jones on the legendary *Louisiana Hayride* radio show. For *Cass County*, his first solo album in 15 years, Henley went back to those roots, recording in Nashville with singing partners like Mick Jagger, Merle Haggard, Dolly Parton, Miranda Lambert and Alison Krauss. "I got people whose voices move me, people whose music I respect," says Henley. "They're real singers who can really get the job done."

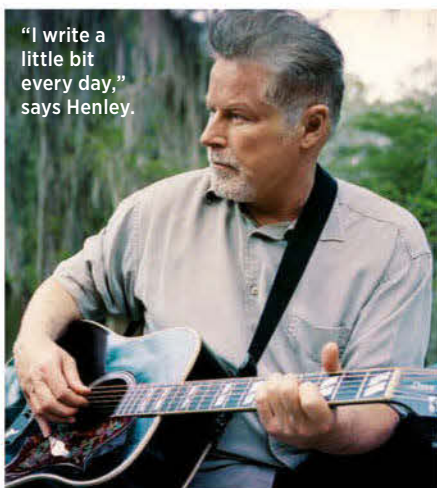
Henley wrote songs for the album during the 250-kilometre drive between Dallas and his tiny hometown of Linden in Cass County, Texas, drawing inspiration from a landscape he describes as "where the Old South meets the West". Co-produced by former Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers drummer Stan Lynch, the

songs stretch from country and blues to rock and Americana, the kind of organic blend he's specialised in since the Eagles' early days.

Henley spent five years on *Cass County*, recording in Dallas and Orlando as well as Nashville. Henley, Jagger and Lambert mix voices on "Bramble Rose", originally by singer-songwriter Tift Merritt, and there are hints of the Eagles' "Desperado" on the understated Haggard duet "The Cost of Living". Parton appears on "When I Stop Dreaming", a bittersweet 1955 classic by the Louvin Brothers. Henley had hoped to record with Jones, but that collaboration couldn't be arranged before the iconic singer's death in 2013. "I'll always regret that," says Henley.

Henley – who has toured steadily and recorded one studio album with the Eagles since the band reformed in 1994 – enjoyed the process of getting back in the studio, and also spending time in Nashville. "They have the heart-attack food that I grew up on," he says. And he doesn't expect it'll take another decade and a half before he releases his next album. "I write a little bit every day," he says. "I still hope that my best work is ahead of me."

STEVE APPLEFORD



"I write a little bit every day," says Henley.



THE YEAR'S FRESHEST BUDDY COMEDY

New film finds laughs in the lives of L.A.'s trans prostitutes

Filmmaker Sean Baker was intrigued by the transgender streetwalkers he'd seen in his West Hollywood neighbourhood, so one day he approached a tall, striking woman named Mya Taylor to ask her for stories. Says the director, "She told me she'd help me make a movie on two conditions: 'You have to be brutal and show what it's like on the streets... and you have to make it funny.'" The result is *Tangerine*, a raucous comedy starring Taylor and breakout performer Kitana Kiki Rodriguez. Shot on an iPhone, it's the year's best microbudget buddy movie. "We weren't trying to be part of a revolution," says Baker. "But when you see Mya and Kiki, you understand why these stories need to be told."

DAVID FEAR



THE TRAGEDY OF THE GIBB BROTHERS

New book delves deep into one of rock's most famous families

Rolling Stone writer Jeff Apter can clearly recall the moment he decided to write his latest book, *Tragedy: The Sad Ballad of the Gibb Brothers*. "As soon as I saw Barry Gibb standing alone onstage in 2013 during his Mythology

tour, I couldn't help but notice what a forlorn figure he struck. We're so used to seeing the three Gibbs on stage as the Bee Gees, that the image of Barry alone really drove home the recent loss of Maurice and Robin. That was the starting point for me, that inherent sense of tragedy. I also wanted to explore the strong bond the Gibbs had with Australia: this is where

they were raised and where they served their musical apprenticeship." So began more than a year of research and writing as Apter unearthed old filmed performances, early interviews, press releases and old recordings. "It's such a poignant story, with such a rich soundtrack, that I found myself with enough material for two books, maybe more."

ROD YATES

Diplo

The Major Lazer and Jack Ü star on Madonna, Bieber, and why he doesn't hate on EDM
By Brian Hiatt

FOR PRODUCER-DJ DIPLO, THE PAST 12 years have been a slow but unremitting march from the ultra-hip fringes to the dead centre of pop music. Recently he had two chart-topping singles from two different projects: the Justin Bieber-featuring "Where R U Now", from his Jack Ü collaboration with Skrillex, and "Lean On", from his dancehall-inflected act Major Lazer, which went from studio lark to festival-packing force. Diplo, who first broke through to the mainstream circa 2005 as M.I.A.'s producer, says there's never been a master plan: "I've been 100 per cent improvising," he says. "When I moved to L.A. to produce and write, I kept DJ'ing on the side, but I thought that was never gonna go anywhere."

So is Justin Bieber officially cool now?

He'd been stuck in a rut where he has to do a certain thing because of his fan base. Guy from Disclosure texted me, "Yo, man, that Bieber record is amazing", and I'm like, "Man, you would've never written that a year ago", and he's like, "I know, this is very difficult for me to text right now." Bieber's personal life is whatever it is – he's a rich kid and he's pretty much gonna have to be a jerk. But he's respectful to me, and he has that weird gene where he's good at everything: better at basketball than me, better at drums. For us it's more like an art project where you utilise his voice.

You're a thoughtful guy, but your social-media persona is sort of obnoxious. Why?

If I have a fight with somebody, it makes me look like a prick, but it makes the social-media numbers explode. It's the Kanye West theory: In 2015, become a prick and just get more popular. I don't want to be thought of like that, but also I just don't really care. I'm doing jokes and people take it seriously, like that's the person I am.

Any chance of squashing your beef with Taylor Swift, after your comments about her "booty"?

We squashed it! I saw her at the Grammys and she was supernice and cool. Her fans loved the beef, though. That's all they have – they don't have, like, real things going on. It's still startling when these artists pay attention to my Twitter. Like, Ed Sheeran unfollowed me when I said something about Taylor – I can't believe these people even know who I am.

EDM's rise boosted your career, but you also stand apart from it. How do you see that relationship?

It's been a slow evolution in America – [there they] still have the biggest, glossiest, most masculine music at EDM raves. But it's got young people excited about

music. Jack Ü is headlining festivals now, and Skrillex and I are up there playing random records, doing what I love, being unpredictable, being trendsetting. Some of the big guys are changing too – David Guetta's new album, nothing's really dance on that. And there's stuff like Disclosure and [French house producer] Tchami that's not about being the biggest and brightest. Skrillex – there's no precedent for what he's doing and what he could do. His persona can be as big as a rock star.

You co-produced several songs on

Madonna's new one, including her new single. What do you make of the ageism she faces?

She created the world we live in. It already sucks to be a woman in the music industry, but to be a boss woman is even harder. She sold out her tour in minutes, but no one seems to want her to succeed – "Madonna, we've been there, done that, now we're about Kim Kardashian." Her song "Ghosttown" was a guaranteed Number One for anybody else, but she didn't get a fair shot. With "Bitch I'm Madonna", everyone said there's no way it will go anywhere, but I'm like, "Screw it, it represents you more than anything."

You're 36 – do you worry about aging out of pop yourself?

There's not usually the old white dude in the music industry. You either get a job in management or you're Willie Nelson – the only dude that's cool and old.

But age has nothing to do with it, as long as people are paying attention to me.

Your music is pretty raucous – what do you listen to when you want something chill?

I love Marvin Gaye, I like jazz and all that stuff. I used to be a record collector. Mark Ronson, Questlove and I used to be part of, like, a record-trading crew. Classic rock, psychedelic rock – I like to dig up old music and see what I can get influenced by.

What would you do with a rock band?

I've done a lot of songs with Ezra Koenig [of Vampire Weekend], some really cool stuff that I hope people get to hear. We wrote a couple of things for another artist that might be huge records for the end of summer – one of them started with a Vampire Weekend idea. But he's not traditional rock – he's like me, a hodgepodge of styles and influences. And I have a studio with [producer] Ariel Rechtshaid, so every day I'm harassing Haim to listen to my beats. But I don't make anything that they ever like [laughs]! My first production job after M.I.A. was actually the xx, but they didn't like what I did, and at the end of the day we used their demos.

Any other unexpected collaborators?

I just did a session with the Band Perry, and I didn't think that would work. But I listened to it yesterday – I'm like, "Yo, this is a big, awesome song." The way we recorded it was unorthodox – I just did it in a room with a mandolin. I mean, I'll try anything once. 🎸



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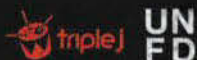
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Jack Antonoff's Dream Life

DAWN TO DUSK JACK ANTONOFF was already the lead guitarist for a chart-topping band, fun., when he decided to start a brand-new solo project, Bleachers, not long ago. The gamble paid off: Bleachers scored a Number One alt-rock hit in the U.S. last year with "I Wanna Get Better", and Antonoff has been writing and producing for artists like Taylor Swift and Grimes. "I'm honoured it worked out," he says. "It could've been a disaster!" We hung with Antonoff at the Brooklyn Heights apartment he shares with girlfriend Lena Dunham, then headed to Manhattan to watch him produce new music by the Canadian dance duo Chromeo.

PATRICK DOYLE



To see an exclusive video of Antonoff's day, including a studio performance and a Lena Dunham cameo, visit rsaus.com/jackantonoff



EGG MAN

Antonoff cooks up his daily broccoli-and-pepper omelet. "It's very bland – no cheese," he says (dairy affects his vocals). "It's like a good meal in prison."

ON THE RUN

Going for his daily jog around Brooklyn Heights.

SOME NIGHTS

Waiting to get picked up from the studio by Dunham. "We'll be in bed and I'll play her what I did on my phone that day. She'll either have an emotional reaction or not. That's all that matters."



SOCK ROCK

Antonoff admits, "Tank tops are kind of douchey."



FOR THE RECORD

In the studio with Chromeo. Antonoff likes every song he works on to meet three requirements: "You want a piece of the past to invite someone in. Then a very modern element, and then futuristic elements that scare the crap out of them."





ANGER IS AN ENERGY
Dead Letter Circus
(Benzie, second right)

Dead Letter Circus Rage Against the Machine

Brisbane rockers overcome creative lull to release fired-up third album

THERE WAS A POINT, AS DEAD LETTER CIRCUS'S U.S. tour ground to a halt in 2013, that the Brisbane quintet didn't know if they wanted to make another album. Not straight away, anyway. The rigours of life on the road in another country – vocalist Kim

Benzie estimates they drove 35,000 kilometres in one month – supporting metal acts whose fans weren't quite sure how to take DLC's more intricate melodies had left them uninspired. Regardless, they ploughed on and spent 2014 touring, attending to their personal lives and working on the *Stand Apart* EP, which reimagined songs from 2013's *The Catalyst Fire* in an acoustic setting. Come January this year they decided to book studio time and, armed with only a few ideas, see if they

could get excited about writing new music. Two months later they emerged with their third album, *Aesthesis*. "Once we made the decision we were like, let's write a whole new album and create a sound so that no one ever mistakes us for a metal band again," says Benzie. "From that point on we just snapped into music mode."

"I had a bunch of really basic ideas," he adds, "just really simple ones. [In the past] we would always start in pursuit of some really high energy rock, and then you'd match the vocals to that. We did it in reverse this time and wrote the core of the story [first]."

A more personal album than its predecessors (*The Catalyst Fire* and 2010's *This is the Warning*; Benzie credits the band's 2007 EP as an influence in that regard), it still picks up on the political and social themes of those records, as Benzie rallies against apathy and the constructs through which those in power attempt to make us live our lives. "A lot of the new album actually borders on bleak at times, where it's kind of pointing out a few of the really obvious things and going, time's nearly up, get your shit together," he explains.

Case in point is first single "While You Wait", with the line "Your apathy puts your hand on the blade of the mother slain". "What I'd love is for people to be singing the melody and have it stuck in their head, and then take time to peel back the lyrics and go, 'Holy shit, I've been singing about my own apathy,'" says Benzie. "And then have a moment to think about it." **ROD YATES**

MACCABEES GO BIGGER, TOUGHER ON FOURTH ALBUM

British five-piece return with first record in three years

It's the day after Glastonbury, and the Maccabees' guitarist Felix White is back home in South London "rehabilitating" after a triumphant comeback show.

"The gig was amazing," he says of their return to Worthy Farm after six years. "There were loads of people, we had Jamie T do a song with us. It was a pretty intense experience, it was great."

That song was "Marks To Prove It", the title track from their first album in three years. After the expansive *Given To the Wild* – which was nominated for a Mercury in 2012 – White says they wanted to create a stripped-back album of shifting moods; one

that could be recreated live. He says "Marks To Prove It" – the album's most energetic track – felt like blowing out the cobwebs.

"It's got a flippancy and a freedom about it, which is sometimes difficult to afford yourself when you make a record for three years."

Part of the reason for the long delay was the band's insistence on giving all five members an equal say in the songwriting process. They holed up in their own Elephant Studios – formerly owned by the Jesus and Mary Chain – in Central London, working 10am to 1am shifts for months on end. The lashings of piano and female vocals only add to the record's nocturnal vibe.



"We've been vindicated in the way we've gone about it," explains the guitarist. "The new songs are the toughest, biggest and the most complete Maccabees songs that we've ever done. They stand up anywhere."

DARREN LEVIN

PROFILE

Northlane's Brave New World

Globetrotting Sydney metalcore sensations switch singers and continue to head north **By Matt Reekie**

NORTHLANE ARE ATTEMPTING one of the most dangerous feats in the whole rock circus – switching vocalists while the band are on the upswing. And they may just pull it off, too.

The group have already performed one act worthy of the great Houdini, rising out of Sydney's harsh western suburbs to worldwide acclaim on the back of a pair of progressive metalcore epics, *Discoveries* (2011) and the Top 5 hit *Singularity* (2013). But when original singer Adrian Fitipalides announced last year that he didn't have enough of the road dog in him to pursue a career in rock any further, the remaining members – guitarists Josh Smith and Jon Deiley, bassist Alex Milovic and drummer Nic Pettersen – were forced to reach back into their bag of tricks.

"We weren't going to let one person leaving stop us, after we'd all worked so hard," says Smith. "It just made us even more determined to continue on."

Even before Fitipalides split, Northlane had been plotting a new course. When they were hit with the news of his departure, the band saw an opportunity to pick a fresh voice that would help take them where they wanted to go.

"We didn't know exactly what that voice would sound like," says Smith. "We kinda realised that we would know it when we heard it."

Enter Marcus Bridge, formerly of fellow Sydneysiders Sound of Seasons, who was plucked from over 2000 respondents to an open call for video auditions online.

"My old band played a couple of shows with Northlane, back before *Discoveries* had even come out," Bridge recalls. "I've seen them grow and get recognised overseas. I remember when [2013 single] 'Quantum Flux' came out, I was at a mate's

house and we had that on repeat for hours. So it's pretty surreal to now be a part of it."

Bridge landed his dream gig and was thrown straight in the deep end. Within days, he and the band had written and recorded a new single, "Rot", and within weeks he was performing in front of 3000 fans in Sweden.

"I didn't expect it to go so smoothly," says Bridge. "I can be socially awkward and a bit weird at times, and it's such a high-pressure situation as well, coming into a new band, but we have gelled quickly. On tour, I'm learning every day. The other guys have got it down pretty good so they help me out."

Bridge has had to cop the obligatory "I like your old stuff better than your new stuff" from sections of the fanbase; that's a given for a frontman joining an established group. But in his case the difference between old and new is amplified by the brave new Northlane sound.

Their new album, *Node*, is as much of a coming-out party for the band as it is for Bridge. Recorded in New Jersey with long-time producer Will Putney, *Node* is less flighty than its predecessors, rooted more deeply in song and burning with ambition.

"Even before Marcus joined the band we knew this would be a polarising record," says Smith. "If we didn't release something that had that effect

we would feel like we were doing something wrong. It's something we've come to expect because we are always trying to innovate and move forward."

As the man in the hot seat, Bridge admits he has experienced some anxious moments in the lead up to *Node*'s release, but is trying to take the "big picture" view.

"This album is something that as a group we would want to listen to, as opposed to just recording a 'heavy' album with breakdowns and whatever on it," he says. "If people aren't necessarily fans of it, that would suck, but we just did what we wanted and we couldn't be happier."

Best-case? *Node* becomes the new *Back in Black*.

"Well," laughs Bridge, "I can hope!"



We weren't going to let one person leaving stop us after we'd all worked so hard."



NEW BEGINNING
Northlane (l-r): Alex
Milovic, Jon Deiley,
Josh Smith, Marcus
Bridge, Nic Pettersen



EXPERT
OPINION

Skrillex

We asked the EDM star – whose Jack Ü project with Diplo released its debut album this year – to check out five songs.

OLD

Grateful Dead

"China Cat Sunflower"

My dad was a big fan of the Dead, so I used to hear them all the time around the house. This song is so psychedelic and free-flowing and deep. It's like it's in 3D.

Janis Joplin

"Cry Baby"

This is one of my favourite vocal performances by Joplin. It's a forgiveness song. If a girl wrote a song like this about me, I would be so flattered.

Aphex Twin

"Bucephalus Bouncing Ball"

So incredible. It's a crazy journey, like five songs in one. I've memorised every single hit and solo and accent.

NEW

Taylor Swift feat. Kendrick Lamar

"Bad Blood"

A year ago, you never would have thought that Kendrick and Taylor would make a song together. I think it's awesome. Really fun.

Fetty Wap

"Trap Queen"

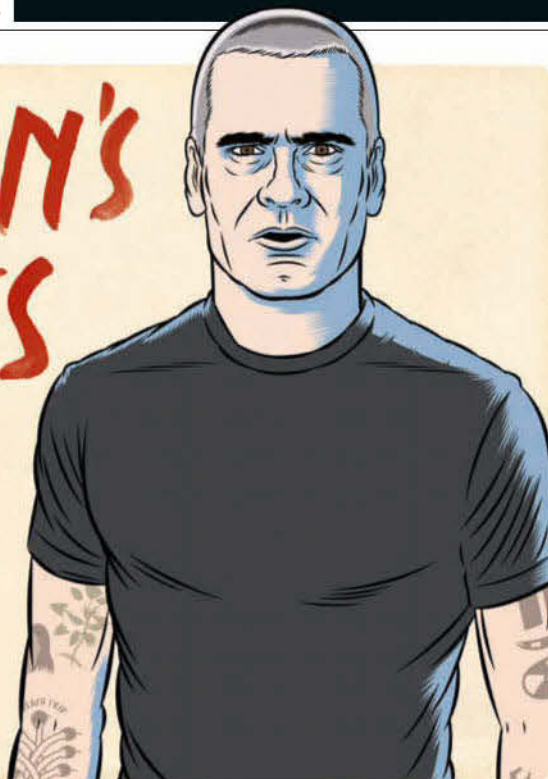
The anthem of the summer. I play this record in almost all my sets. You can't help but sing along.



A FAN'S NOTES

BY HENRY
ROLLINS

Our man in the
van looks back
on an American
institution



JULY 9, 1995, AT CHICAGO'S Soldier Field was the last time Jerry Garcia appeared with the Grateful Dead. On the 9th day of August – 20 years ago this month – Garcia died of a heart attack at age 53.

Almost two decades later, Dead members Bob Weir, Mickey Hart, Bill Kreutzmann and Phil Lesh, with Trey Anastasio, Jeff Chimenti and Bruce Hornsby fleshing out the line-up, appeared at Soldier Field on July 3, 4 & 5 for three final shows, billed as "Fare Thee Well: Celebrating 50 Years of Grateful Dead". I don't know what traction the band ever got in Australia but in America the Grateful Dead were a true cultural phenomenon.

They were a band whose loyal fans were almost always cast in the pejorative. "Deadhead" was equivalent to filthy hippie, red menace scum. I remember many people writing the band off completely because of the fans without ever checking out the music.

I used to be one of those people until someone loaned me a few Dead albums: *American Beauty*, *Workingman's Dead* and *Anthem of the Sun*. The high level of musicianship on the albums was obvious, but for me bands have to prove themselves live.

The first time I saw the Dead play was September 15, 1985, in Chula Vista, CA. I would go to four more of their shows

in the next year. They were quite simply one of the best bands I have ever seen. For me, it was the double drums of Hart and Kreutzmann locking in with bassist Lesh. It was a tremendously intuitive and powerful rhythm trio.

I saw a lot of parallels between the Dead and Black Flag. Both bands toured hard and valued the quality of live performance, from the playing to the audio. One of the examples for Black Flag getting their own sound system for their last three years was due to the Dead's total autonomy and control over their presentation. Both bands were insular, and while associated with certain social strata, were quite independent of any group and were often at odds with their audience. They are perhaps the last two bands you would ever think would have any relationship at all. Of any band on the road in those days, the Dead would be the one I would compare Black Flag to.

It was odd, towards the end of Garcia's life, when the Dead were accepted by the "other America". With that came people drinking beer and fighting in the parking lot. I think the band were somewhat amused by the embrace of MTV viewers.

Why did they play these shows in Chicago? I always felt a beautiful melancholy at the end of a Dead show. Perhaps they just wanted to go out one last time to say fare thee well.

"I saw a lot of parallels between the Grateful Dead and Black Flag. Both bands toured hard."



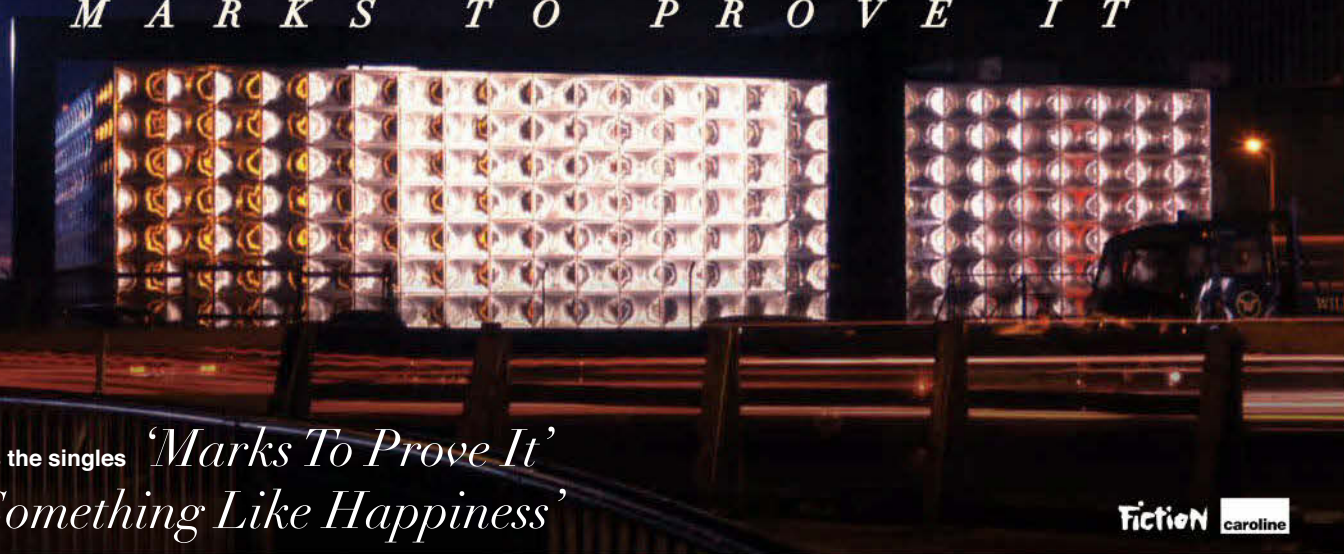
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ON THE ROAD

Meg Mac's Tour Diary



The Melbourne singer writes about her recent American tour with D'Angelo

MY NAME IS MEG Mac and I'm from Australia. D'Angelo & the Vanguard are taking me around America."

I say this every night after my first song to the crowd. There is this mutual understanding that I am a very lucky person and I can feel it. I can feel the slight confusion as I first walk out on to the stage, a very real and strong feeling that I'd better be good and have something to say.

I am nervous every night, but once I sing it goes away.

The dressing rooms are usually close enough in most of the venues that I can hear D (that's what everyone calls him) and the band warming up together. They're all singing together and clapping – I have never heard anything like it in real life. I watch them all in a circle chanting in the carpark in Dallas, D'Angelo

gives me a big hug and then joins everyone for the pre-show ritual. I am inspired before the real show has even started.

Before the tour began I would listen to his music over and over as if it was my tour homework and I needed to prepare myself and know everything. But every moment I had with the guys, they wanted to talk about my music, they were so nice. I was travelling around a country, so far from home, I was gone a long time – but it felt like some sort of home.

I liked to watch the show from the audience and soak it all up, but there was something so special about watching from the side of stage and being able to see his audience. They were so happy. There is so much energy in these rooms, what he does is so powerful.

I have been counting down the days until I get to do a show again since I got back to Australia – there is nothing better than the real thing. And being a part of this tour has made sure I never ever forget that. 🎶



▲ Our Van

When I first saw our van I was comparing it to my summer family road trips to Queensland with five kids in the back of a Tarago. This was fancy, it had Wi-Fi and a TV. We rocked up to the first show in Oakland and parked between two out of three enormous deluxe tour buses. It wasn't so fancy anymore.



Tour Pass

I am working on my artist pass lanyard collection. Now I have six.

▼ Soundcheck

The venues are the biggest and the nicest I've ever played. Chandeliers and buildings with lots of history – I like to feel like I am singing on a stage where others have sung before me and I am soaking it up and it is making me sing better or something like that. It is a good feeling, even if I made it up.





◀ Up In Lights

A reminder of just how lucky I am, lit up on a giant sign in Denver, Colorado.

Utah

Everyone was arguing about this toilet break (my fault) but look at this view.



LA Merch Desk ▶

This is me at the merch desk in LA when I should have been in my dressing room meeting Kate Hudson. She walked into my room after watching the show to say hello when I decided to go and say hi to people at the merch desk. One of my tour regrets.



New York Show

In New York, Gary Clark Jr also played so we all got a photo backstage so we didn't forget.



NEW ALBUM

Shane Nicholson Opens Up

Award-winning songwriter wasn't lacking inspiration for his sixth solo album

'CATHARSIS" IS A WORD Shane Nicholson uses frequently to describe *Hell Breaks Loose*, his first album since the demise of his marriage to fellow singer-songwriter Kasey Chambers, which several songs on the record confront.

"It's a less guarded record than ever before," he says. "They've all been honest but this is certainly less dressed up in metaphor and disguise."

"There were songs where I thought, 'Wow that's a bit pointed', but I decided that I wouldn't sugarcoat it."

The other vital inspiration was a trip to Central Australia to spend time with his friend, indigenous singer Warren H. Williams, whom Nicholson describes as his "Mr Miyagi", and whom he credits with reinvigorating his songwriting mojo.

"I felt this immediate removal from my life, which offered so much perspective after this tumultuous period."

"It's my favourite record," he adds. "It feels like all the records before have been just precursors and trial runs." **BARNABY SMITH**



WILDER MINDS
Mumford, Marshall, Lovett and Dwane (from left), in New Jersey in June.

PROFILE

Mumford's New Road

On the bus as the band goes electric at Bonnaroo and beyond. By Patrick Doyle

MUMFORD & SONS ARE STUCK in Tennessee traffic on the way to Bonnaroo a day before their headlining set, their bus nosing past a series of Waffle Houses and Flying J truck stops. "Is it going to take us three hours to get to this fucking place?" banjo-guitarist Winston Marshall wonders to no one in particular. A messy-haired Marcus Mumford flips channels on the bus TV, failing to find the Wales-Belgium soccer game. Marshall sits on the couch, his newly grown-out hair spilling onto his unbuttoned white Renaissance-style shirt, blasting Kendrick Lamar from his iPad.

It's the second week of their summer U.S. tour, and one of the most important shows of their career: the first major fes-

tival set since the release of their third album, *Wilder Mind*, and a return to Bonnaroo, a gig they had to cancel in 2013 after bassist Ted Dwane fell ill. "It feels really lucky to be back," says Mumford. "It makes us want to smash it even more than we would've done two years ago."

Bonnaroo holds a special place in their hearts: They were nervous before they first played here, in 2010, but their heroes Dave Rawlings, Gillian Welch and Old Crow Medicine Show all joined them during their side-stage afternoon slot for a version of "Wagon Wheel." "British bands are quite gang-y at London festivals," says Marshall. "Here, they welcomed us with open arms."

Mumford moved up to the huge second stage in 2011, and they were booked to headline the main stage in 2013 after the enormous success of their second album, *Babel*. But two weeks before that set, Dwane started feeling sick onstage in Berkeley. He played a few more dates be-

fore doctors told him he needed emergency surgery; a blood clot was removed from the surface of his brain. "It was just pure relief, really, because I had been feeling so bad for a week," says Dwane.

The band held a tense meeting in an Austin hotel room, where Dwane insisted he could play Bonnaroo against doctors' orders, but his bandmates outvoted him. "He was really skinny and he'd been sick for, like, two weeks, just vomiting his guts out – great weight-loss program," says Mumford. "He still had that blue marker on his head. He looked fucking awesome. He looked like something out of *Schindler's List*."

"That might be my next look, actually," adds Marshall.

Despite today's traffic, they are in good spirits, bantering about the escaped prisoners in New York state ("Fair play to them," says keyboardist Ben Lovett). Marshall makes fun of Bonnaroo's slogan ("Radiate positivity, guys!" he says mock-

ingly as he flips through the schedule) and wonders whether the waitress was flirting with him at breakfast that morning. "It was totally unprofessional – she practically invited me up to her room," he says, with more than a little pride.

"You were peacocking," says Dwane. In contrast to the rest of the group – especially Mumford and Lovett, who are both married – the exuberant Marshall makes no secret of how much he's enjoying the rock-star life on the road: "I'm a single man, so I've got not much to go home to," he says. "And I haven't got many friends, either. I'm losing them. Will you be my friend?" When the bus finally makes it to the festival's back entrance, he looks out the window and sees a crowd of barely dressed women. "Titties!" he exclaims. "Time for babe-watch. I'll be at the front of the bus."

Mumford are returning to Bonnaroo looking and sounding like a very different band from the one they were not long ago. *Wilder Mind* replaces the banjo, kick drum and acoustic instruments of their first two albums with drum machines, along with electric guitars soaked in delay pedals. "It's been interesting approaching the set list, because we're definitely different to how we were two years ago," says Mumford. "Part of us has been like, 'Well, should we be playing the show we would've played two years ago?' but we don't want to do that." He smiles. "Is the audience going to want us to play the show we did two years ago? Probably they do, but they're not going to get that. They're gonna get a new one, which we think is way better."

The instrumentation isn't the only new element on *Wilder Mind*. After a conversation on the last tour, the bandmates completely changed their songwriting process. While Mumford wrote most of the God-fearing, Shakespeare-influenced lyrics of their first two albums, this time every band member brought songs to the sessions, with studio time divided equally between each member's material.

The band also won't say who wrote what song – although you can guess that Dwane or Marshall, both of whom recently split with longtime girlfriends, had a hand in break-up songs such as "Tompkins Square Park" and "Ditmas".

"There's always been very little ego in the band, which has always been very healthy and good for us," says Lovett backstage at a Massachusetts gig a few days before Bonnaroo. "Much to Marcus' credit – especially with his name above the door and with people constantly pushing the limelight onto him – he as much as all of us understands the pure democracy of the band."

Wilder Mind sold less than half of what *Babel* did in its opening week, and reviews have been mixed. But the band stands by it: "It's our best record," says Lovett. Adds Mumford, "People have been willing to come with us. Because we didn't know whether they would. There was no guaranteeing, because we changed quite a lot of the formulas that were working for people, you know."



BACK ON TRACK Warming up backstage at Bonnaroo. The band had to cancel their 2013 performance when Ted Dwane (back) fell ill.

In addition to acoustic instruments, the band have also abandoned the waistcoats and vests of their old wardrobe, leaning more heavily now on blazers and leather jackets. "[People are saying] 'Wow, so you've really changed the way you look,'" says Mumford. "Everyone changes the way they look over a nine-year period, apart from my dad. What kind of a fucking question is that? It's the sort of celebrity culture that we live in."

Perhaps because he's most in the public eye, Mumford is especially sensitive to any talk about his personal life. I met him earlier that week in Massachusetts, hours after a news report broke that his wife, actress Carey Mulligan, was pregnant with their first child.

As we played basketball, I offered brief congratulations. "For what?" he said, stepping back. "Is that news? I think that's gossip." (He then headed to soundcheck and cancelled the interview. He doesn't mention it when we meet again at Bonnaroo.)

Back at Bonnaroo, after a searing set by My Morning Jacket as the sun went down, a sunburned crowd bounces beach balls and waits for Mumford & Sons to take

the stage. From there, the audience seems to go on forever – more fans checked into Mumford's performance on the festival app than any other act of the weekend.

Mumford stubs out a cigarette as the band reach the stage and deliver their solemn acoustic hymn "Lovers' Eyes" in complete darkness for three minutes, until after the second chorus, when the lights go up with a kick-drum thud and a blast

of horns and strings. The field erupts, and the bandmates harmonise as Mumford strums his acoustic furiously. "Holy shit, there's a lot of you," he says.

There are a few jitters – Mumford grabs a guitar and starts playing a different song when he was supposed to play "Lover of the Light". "I fucked up," he says, before heading to the drum set for a slow rendition of "Lover". Afterward, he shakes his head and Marshall pats him on the back.

It was all forgotten by the time Ed Helms came onstage to play banjo on the singalong "Awake My Soul". Mumford introduces the band, and Dwane gets the biggest response, the crowd chanting his name as he plays a goofy bass line, as if to deflect attention. "One of the reasons we're glad he's alive is so we could come back and play this festival," Mumford says. "He did it to get more attention. What a wanker."

For the final song, Mumford invites members of Dawes, My Morning Jacket and Hozier for the Joe Cocker version of the Beatles' "With a Little Help From My Friends". Mumford trades verses with Jim James and Taylor Goldsmith before he perfectly nails Cocker's ragged, climactic shriek. Then, as the song enters double time, he grabs a tambourine and pounds away. As the song fades out, there are bro hugs all around onstage. "It was a good day," Mumford says with a wave. "It was a good day."



“

My style of dancing is a cross between slam dancing and hip-hop dancing. It's not good.”

MY SOUNDTRACK

Josh Pyke

Appreciates fine songwriting, dances with gusto, has a slightly morbid side. By Rod Yates

The First Song I Learned To Play

Soundgarden "Outshined", 1991



"It's in Drop D tuning, and I still play in Drop D tuning. Every song on every album [of mine] is in Drop D, and it's because this is the song that I learned how to play guitar to. A guy at my high school introduced me to Soundgarden. Up until that point I was exclusively into Guns N'Roses. As soon as I learned how to play this song I started writing my own songs, so for me it was a revelation, it was like unlocking the key to being able to write my own songs."

The Song I Fell In Love To

Iron & Wine "Naked As We Came", 2004



"It's not the song I fell in love to, but it's the song I walked down the aisle to, and it's just beautiful. It's very much about the idea of longevity in a relationship. The lyrics are 'One will spread our ashes round the yard' – it's fucking heavy. But it reminds me of the concept of commitment and falling in love. I can't hear that song without it being an emotional memory."

The Song People Wouldn't Expect Me To Like

Rihanna "Umbrella", 2007



"When it's going 'ella ella', there's one chord change which is so good, and it makes the whole song for me. It changes to this weird diminished minor chord, and it just changes the song from being bland pop into something much more interesting."

The Song That Makes Me Cry

Sufjan Stevens "Death With Dignity", 2015



"Even when I talk about it I get emotional. It's so good. The whole album is about his mother passing away, and when you listen to the

lyrics of that song with that in mind it's like, my god. The first time I heard it I [cried]. It's more an empathetic reaction to a guy who's reduced to feeling like a little child. And I guess having kids changes your perspective on parenthood. As much as it's not particularly manly to cry to songs, it's also what I'm hoping will happen. That's what I want out of music, a full-on emotional response."

The Song That Gets Me on the Dancefloor

OutKast "Hey Ya!", 2003



"I'm not much of a dancer, but I can't pass that one up. It's a great karaoke song as well. I remember singing that song at karaoke with Kevin Mitchell on the night that I met him before we started a tour together, and we ended up at a karaoke bar and we bonded over singing that song. There was a lot of dancing. My style of dancing is a cross between how you would slam dance to grunge and punk, and hip-hop dancing. A lot of shoulder flicking. It's not good, none of it's good."

The Song I'm Most Proud Of

Josh Pyke "Middle of the Hill", 2007



"It's the song that opened every opportunity I've had since, it changed the trajectory of my life, so that makes me pretty proud. When did I realise it was connecting? I'd been booked on the Big Day Out on one of the small stages early in the day, and I was expecting there to be a spattering of 50 people, and it was fucking chockers, and I was blown away. It was the day the Hottest 100 got announced, and it was Number 19. The same day I jumped in the car and drove down to Melbourne to start a tour, and as we went back up the coast I just noticed that more and more people were showing up for my set. And I was like, something's happening here. I knew I loved the song, but I didn't think it would do anything, 'cause it didn't really have a chorus and had a linear progression and a very personal narrative. But it was the one that did it."

The Song I Play Air Guitar To

Guns N'Roses "Sweet Child O'Mine", 1987



"When I was trying to earn money to keep making music I was a guitar teacher briefly, and I taught at a girls' school, and most of the kids weren't that interested, it was just a way to get out of class. But there was this one girl, she was an excellent guitarist, so she wanted to learn the solo for 'Sweet Child O'Mine'. I'm not a good soloist or anything, but I'd go home and really intensely learn it by ear and figure out how it was written down 'cause she was learning it from notation. It's probably the only song in which I can still remember how to play the solo. So when I'm air guitaring it's actually totally accurate."

The Song I Wish I Wrote

The Shins "New Slang", 2001



"It's almost perfect. The moment I heard that song I was like, this is where I want to be musically. I was on a weekend away with a couple of mates and one of them had a SubPop sampler and it had 'New Slang' on it. He basically did to me what the girl in *Garden State* does to the guy, he was like, 'Sit down, you've got to listen to this, it could change your life.' And it just floored me."

The Song I Want Played At My Funeral

Enya "Orinoco Flow", 1988



"When I was about 10 years old I was travelling in the UK with my parents, and Enya's 'Orinoco Flow' was always on the radio, and I fell in love with it. I remember it vividly, walking across this carpark at [supermarket] Tesco and I was like, 'Mum, when I die, can you play this at my funeral?' And she was like, 'OK.' Mum thought I was just talking crazy. So I feel like being a man of my word and still having that played. I was a pretty intense little kid."

Iron Maiden Go To Work, 2008

**Photographed by
John McMurtrie**

"Any band that tells you they aren't affected by the size of an audience is lying. This picture was taken during Iron Maiden's 2008 'Somewhere Back in Time' world tour at the Ullevi stadium, Gothenburg. Being the official photographer for the band I get to witness those moments the public don't usually get to see. I have full access throughout a tour to capture the journey and the adventure from every angle. Janick Gers [right] and Steve Harris were breaking the ice here. It is a big show lasting over two hours with set changes and complex songs, and this photo illustrates that they don't take themselves too seriously. The intro tape with Winston Churchill bellowing the immortal words 'We will fight them on the beaches . . . We will never surrender' is just about to wrap and the roar of the 60,000 sold out crowd is literally deafening. As the band await the pyro explosion which is their cue to launch on stage, the tension is palpable backstage. Tonight is special as Maiden have played to over one million people so far on this tour. The band, crew and all equipment were packed on board their own customised Boeing 757 with the lead singer Bruce Dickinson at the controls in the cockpit. One of the most ambitious and historic tours ever undertaken is only half way through, and tonight's show is just one of many special memories on that tour."



'On Board Flight 666', John McMurtrie's photo documentary on life on the road with Iron Maiden, is out now.





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THE FUTURE IS NOW

We profile five of the hottest artists who are climbing the charts, breaking the Internet or just dominating our office stereos . . .



TIRED LION

SOUNDS LIKE: Donning your best flannel and travelling back to the Nineties to watch *Singles* for the first time

FOR FANS OF: Nirvana, L7, vintage Liz Phair

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: When Matt Tanner was in high school, he showed his friend Sophie Hopes the Smashing Pumpkins' *Siamese Dream* album. "I was like, 'Oh my God, that's what I want my band to sound like!'" re-

calls Hopes. That plan came to fruition in 2012 when vocalist/guitarist Hopes teamed up with guitarist Tanner and drummer Ethan Darnell in Tired Lion (bassist Nick Vasey joined later), and set about making their mark on the Perth scene. Fast forward three years and the band have played Homebake, Splendour in the Grass and Groovin the Moo, supported the 1975, Kingswood and Gyroscope, and watched as Triple J latched onto latest single "I Don't Think You Like Me", from their just-released second EP, *Figurine*.

THEY SAY: "I don't think I'd be around if music wasn't in my life," says Hopes. "I don't know what my purpose would be. I'm a pretty emotional person, and having to explain to somebody if they ask me what's wrong or what I'm feeling, I can't really do it by talking, I literally have to sing it out. When I pick up a guitar, that's like my safety net."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: "Suck" – all Nineties soft-quiet dynamics with a killer melodic twist and a hook begging to be shouted at summer festivals: "I'm strung out, I'm strung out, I'm strung out!"

ROD YATES



KAMASI WASHINGTON

SOUNDS LIKE: Jazz fusion that rockets everywhere from electric Miles groove to Sun Ra sputter, from velvety smooth to hardcore squawk – and still sounds as future-minded as any hip-hop or experimental electronic LP out.

FOR FANS OF: Kendrick Lamar, Flying Lotus, Weather Report

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: The Los Angeles saxophonist is the most audacious player in a movement making the electric flurry of Seventies fusion jazz cool again: His lush, bustling arrangements can be heard on both Flying Lotus' *You're Dead!* and Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly*. His gorgeous debut opus, *The Epic*, is 173 minutes of virtuosic playing alongside a 20-piece choir, 32-piece orchestra and the West Coast Get Down, the eight-man jazz Wu-Tang Clan he's a member of alongside Thundercat. The group spent a month recording, working 10 to 12 hours a day, every day, resulting in what Washington claims is eight individual solo projects, nearly 200 songs and two terabytes of music. The three-disc *Epic*, the first album released from the sessions, is 17 songs trimmed from 45. "The hardest part was shrinking it down," he says. "The 17 songs kind of became the complete sentence of what I wanted to put out. Any song that I take out, then I'm missing something."

Washington and the West Coast Get Down honed their connection with one another by practicing furiously in a shack in his dad's backyard in Inglewood, California. "We were at every concert and then we'd go home at 3 o'clock in the morning and play until 7 o'clock in the morning," remembers Washington. "I had cool neighbours. They knew me. They were just proud to see some young brothers doing something positive."

HE SAYS: "I think people were starved for it," says Washington of the sudden appeal of contemporary jazz. "And they had a misconception of what it was. We took it as a challenge. We played at like gothic clubs, literally, for a crowd where upstairs they have an apparatus where they're beating people with whips . . . That spiritual, soul-repairing thing that jazz has has been missing in society for a while. What fixes your spirit when Ferguson happens? You need something to fix it. And now that they're getting it it's like, 'Oh wow, this is a soul fix, not a history lesson.'"

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: Disc three of *The Epic* kicks off with the blazing, 14-minute piece "Re Run Home".

CHRISTOPHER R. WEINGARTEN

“We’d go home at 3 o’clock in the morning and play until 7 in the morning.”



JOSEF SALVAT

SOUNDS LIKE: Suave, sophisticated pop with a knack for sharp lyrics and sharper melodies

FOR FANS OF: Bastille, Sam Smith, Ed Sheeran

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: Currently based in London, the Sydney law-student-turned-charismatic crooner's been blowing up overseas. His love of moody, cinematic pop had early reviews marking him as the "male Lana Del Rey", but he's since proved far more interesting than that simple equation. After breaking through with his gorgeous cover of Rihanna's "Diamonds" (used by Sony for a TV ad campaign), the 27-year-old followed through with his impressive *In Your Prime* EP released last year. Sia, the Preatures and the Jezabels have since confessed they're fans of his work.

HE SAYS: "My album's pretty much ready to go. It's called *Night Swim* and the songs have been written over 10 years. We're just waiting to confirm a release date, but that's some record label dark arts stuff so you'll have to wait and see."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: The deliciously dark "Hustler" (and its mini-movie music video).

JASON TREUEN

THE STAVES

SOUNDS LIKE: A dive into a watering hole on a sweltering summer day

FOR FANS OF: Laura Marling, deep thinking, humming, head-bobbing

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: Watford, England's Staveley-Taylor sisters – Camilla (vocals, ukulele), Emily (vocals) and Jessica (vocals, guitar) – grapple with universal feelings of longing with their harmonic folk. They've joined Mumford and Sons to sing "With a Little Help From My Friends" on Glastonbury's main stage and toured with the likes of the Civil Wars and Bon Iver. Justin Vernon invited them to hang out at his April Base Studio in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, after an extensive global run promoting their first album, 2012's *Dead & Born & Grown*. The trio accepted, going in with no expectations (they didn't even tell their label). But the "special, sacred" time evolved into a stunning collection of songs: Vernon ended up producing the sisters' latest album, the gripping *If I Was*.



"We were on the outside a bit. We'd gravitate to those people who'd pass the guitar around."

Released in March, the band's second record (and Nonesuch debut) is full of swelling orchestras, dense vocal arrangements and thoughtful lyrics.

THEY SAY: "[Growing up] we were sort of on the outside a bit," says Emily. "Outside London and outside Watford. The kind of Watford night out involves the classic drinking to excess and either getting into a fight or throwing up or coping off with someone. We always felt a bit marginalised because we were the people that went out on a weekend wearing trainers and jeans, not dressed up to the nines, and we wanted to dance to rock & roll. It was kind of a feeling of being left out,

not the norm, then we'd gravitate to those other people at parties who'd pass the guitar around."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: "Blood I Bled" is *If I Was*' triumphant opening track. PAULA MEJIA



HALSEY

SOUNDS LIKE: Don't be deceived by delicate single "Ghost". Halsey's larger body of work is cinematic electronica, lyrically inspired by the ragers of the 1990s – Ani, Alanis and Tori.

FOR FANS OF: Sia, Ellie Goulding, Lana Del Rey

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: Remember how excited we all were 10 years ago when Lily Allen's career went berko after she uploaded demos to MySpace? There wound up being more to it than that – a record company was already in place, famous connections, yada yada – but it was a story

that filled the heart of every wannabe with hope. Fast-forward to 2014 and 19-year-old New Jersey native Ashley 'Halsey' Frangipane uploaded "Ghost" to SoundCloud and iTunes. Overnight, five record companies jumped to attention, with Astralwerks – home to Kylie, Nervo and David Guetta – winning the golden ticket. What makes Halsey the full package isn't just the Anime-style turquoise hair or the fact that she writes her own material. She's analytical about the industry and eminently quotable when it comes to philosophising. **SHE SAYS:** "What I can attribute to the speed of the take-off is that my project is an extension of myself. I don't sit down with a team and some fucking mood boards and ask,

'What would Halsey do? What would this look like?' There's not a poster that goes out without my approval. But I have to be a control freak or people would take advantage."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: Her EP, *Room 93*, is a "capsule piece" of teenage lust, longing and living out of hotel rooms. By contrast, debut album *Badlands* (out August 28th) is a concept record about a graphic novel-style alternative universe, and is already at #2 on the iTunes pre-order chart. Frangipane told *Billboard* she wanted to leak the "way more industrial and raw" album – and small wonder she's impatient when her career has been one of rapid metamorphosis. Pacify yourself with one track, "Hold Me Down", on YouTube.

JENNY VALENTIS

Postcards Fr

They might be dysfunctional and unpredictable, but garage rockers Royal Headache refuse to die

BY JONNY NAIL

Photograph By Joshua Morris



Royal Headache, from left: Lawrence Hall, Joe Sukit, Chris Shortt and Tim 'Shogun' Wall at the band's boatshed rehearsal space in the Sydney suburb of Putney

From The Edge



IM WALL BURSTS THROUGH THE GLASS BACKDOORS OF NEWTOWN'S CARLISLE Castle Hotel, drowning in a torn beige overcoat, four sizes too large for his frail frame. He's 20 minutes late and visibly frazzled, quickly side-stepping around the beer garden obstacles: an array of scattered wooden benches and drunk students. He offers his hand. "Fuck, sorry man. I've got this crazy flu." ¶ It's the same unnecessary act of urgency Wall has replicated across the stages of warehouses, pubs and – most recently – the Sydney Opera House over the past six years. There, in his role as lead singer of Sydney band Royal Headache, the man better known as "Shogun" marches purposefully in a dizzying, endless loop, mimicking the soundtrack of punk urgency provided by his three bandmates; a parade paused sporadically when a particular lyric requires an emotional exhalation only achievable from a crouched, clenched position. ¶ But here, in a quiet corner of the smoking section of the Carlisle, that commanding, confident – and often shirtless – stage figure is nowhere

to be seen. In his place sits a softly-spoken 34-year-old man, polite yet concisely blunt, his gaze shyly transfixed downwards. The fact he's even here at all is somewhat of a miracle, considering that as recently as May 2014, Shogun publicly declared he'd left the band.

"I didn't want to be visible," he shrugs. "I just wanted to be like a 'dero'. That's where I'm comfortable."

"It was pretty confusing," guitarist Lawrence Hall, 29, explains a couple of days later. "He's not that upfront. We'll hear it through the grapevine a lot of the time, which is really disheartening."

"It was complex," Shogun insists. "I think I just felt that the band was sort of stuck and I couldn't take it anywhere. I felt like we were 'trotting it out.'"

Serving as consolation for Royal Headache's loyal fanbase was that Shogun's departure came with a conditional disclaimer: he would still complete his vocal duties on the band's long-awaited second album, as well as the obligatory set of live shows to promote it. Then that would be it.

Yet as the band reconvened to start recording and the new album transitioned from Shogun's predicted "huge disappointment and embarrassment" to an indication that "the band was coming to life again", the singer began to sink back into his previous place of permanency. Shogun now clarifies that he's "back in for the foreseeable future", before adding with a wry smirk, "I'm not doing anything else particularly fucking constructive with my life."

Hall attributes the motivation for this second wind mostly to external parties. "The real reason it all came back together was we got an e-mail from this guy in L.A., he just wanted to fly us out, pay for the visas to play a show."

This offer, from Berserkatown festival, also enabled them to book a string of North American dates this August and,

most importantly, gave the new LP a deadline. Meanwhile, as the recording process wrapped, along came an opportunity via Sydney's Repressed Records to headline their Vivid Live night at the Opera House in May. Everything was falling into place.

"The Opera House [show] was a bit of a ceremony," recalls Hall. "It was like, 'Hey, this is it, we're back, the record's coming out, we're gonna be here for a while.'"

It was a triumphant return, marred only by the show's early conclusion. After a handful of punters climbed onto the stage, security and police intervened, forcing Royal Headache to wrap-up their set several songs early. It was, in many ways, a fittingly dramatic climax for a band whose journey has always been synonymous with turmoil.

The singers they auditioned "just didn't work out", and Shogun, who was helping one of the prospects with vocal lines, eventually slotted into the role. In early 2009, the four-piece laid down their first demo, a six-song tape that featured early versions of "Girls" and "Surprise".

With a DIY-attitude inherited from the hardcore scene, the initial distribution plan was simple: Homemade cassettes for the friends, MySpace uploads for the strangers. It was via the latter tool that a dictaphone-recorded early demo of "Eloise" spread across an extensive network of mp3 blogs, eventually landing on taste-making U.S. website Pitchfork.

"That was pretty surprising," Hall recounts. "Like, 'Why are they paying attention to some little Sydney band?'"

"I think I just felt that the band was sort of stuck and I couldn't take it anywhere," says Shogun. "We were trotting it out."

THE ROYAL HEADACHE STORY has its roots in the Hornsby PCYC hardcore scene, where Hall would go to shows as a 14-year-old and watch Shogun and drummer Chris Shortt play in punk bands. As the trio moved into their mid-twenties, explains Shogun, "we started going back to the original punk stuff, which maybe sounded a little bit twee or not fast or brutal enough when we were younger". It was this change in attitude that, in mid-2008, led to the initial incarnation of Royal Headache.

Sans Shogun, the band (including original bassist Andrew Myers) self-recorded an instrumental demo in their rehearsal space – a boatshed at Hall's parents' home in Putney – and set about sourcing a vocalist. "We wanted to be just a power-pop group with a strong female frontwoman," Hall recalls.

The guitarist believes this initial online attention was one of a handful of integral moments where the band began to "gather momentum", holding equal weight with the inclusion of Joe Sukit on bass, who joined shortly after their initial demo cassette. Also important was a particularly memorable early gig at Sydney's now-defunct Club 77. "I think it was our third show, all our friends came and the response was just unbelievable," Hall recalls. "That was probably the show that I realised, 'wow.'"

Shogun has a far less wide-eyed recollection of that formative year. "The circumstances were just so fucking disastrous and ridiculous," he states, accounting his differing opinion to the five-year age gap between he and Hall. He concedes that by that stage, he was already fatigued by what he calls "a disastrous decade of inner-west life".

This is online editor JONNY NAIL's first feature for Rolling Stone.

"I'd been living in houses with fucking drug dealers and fucking psycho idiots for the last 10 years and it rubs off and basically just ruins your life," he explains. "I've [now] moved in with my mum, and it's fucking good."

This attempt to escape the associated indulgences of "living like a 21-year-old when [I] was in fact pushing 30" also left the sinewy singer at a point of re-evaluation. Previously he'd waged something of an internal personality battle – pitting his public persona as "that 'Royal Headache' guy", where it's [about] being a really fucked-up guy and doing shows really [fucked-up]" against the self-described

a formative influence on the Royal Headache guitar sound – was "a faithful and realist recording", with minimal interference. An exercise in lo-fi fidelity limitations, yet also an attempt to capture the band's raw live energy.

"Mikey was the kind of guy who just stuck the mic there [on the ground] and hit record," Hall explains. "Zero production, just the way we wanted. It was just really clean and simple."

Simple, that is, until it came time for Shogun to record his parts. After taking two days to track all the instruments, Hall estimates they spent about six to nine months doing vocals. "Probably about 50

That fact hasn't just rejuvenated Shogun's interest in the band, but it also forms the foundation for *High*, their long-awaited second LP, due later this month. What the band consider to be the debut's "degree of monotony" has been replaced with a wide patchwork of genres and a notable enunciation of their soulful side. The leap from tender ballad "Wouldn't You Know" to the confrontational taunts of "Garbage" mimics Shogun's own agitated personality. This musical schizophrenia can, in part, be attributed to producer Jon Hunter, of Sydney band the Holy Soul.

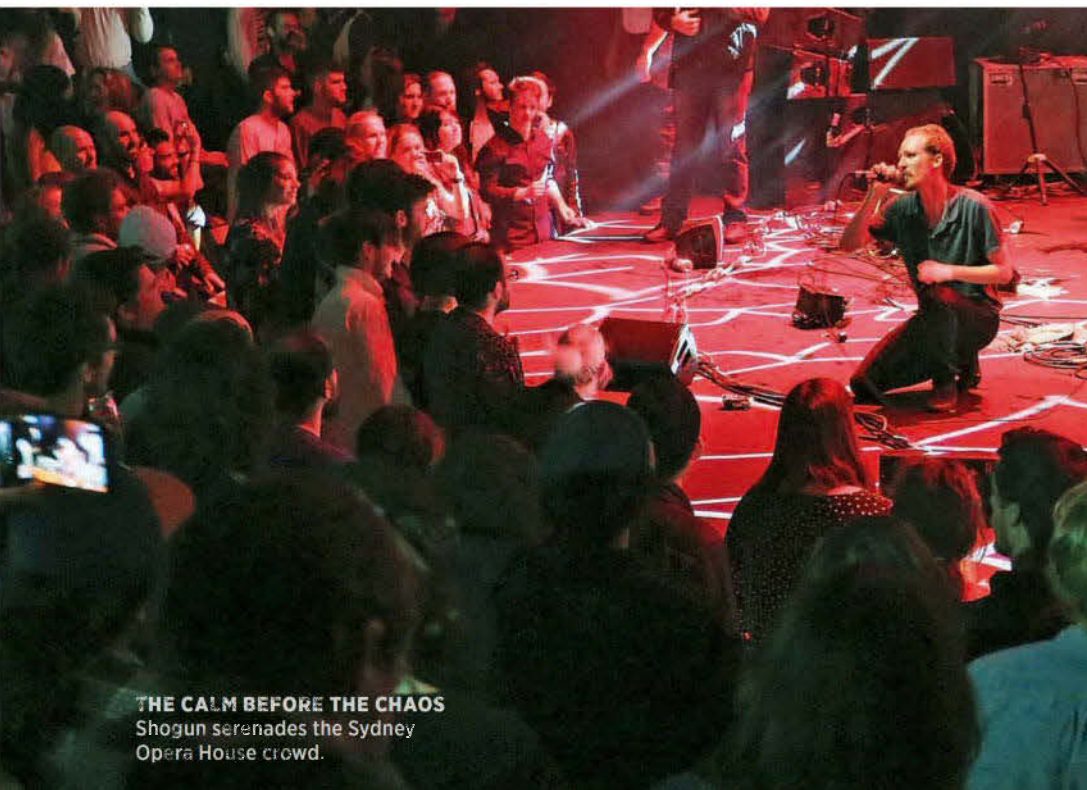
"Jon is more of a sound artist [than Mikey Young] and he gives weird noise stuff with lots of effects," Shogun explains. "He was happy to experiment and he was very patient with me because I was quite fussy, trying to get the right sound on things."

The diary-entry confessions of their first outing ("I'll take you home, but my bedroom smells like cum") have also been abandoned for a wider perspective. "My Own Fantasy", *High*'s opener, transitions from a fictional rock & roll existence starring "tons of girls", a parody of escapism – "nothing to do with the real world anymore" – before looking internally, Shogun concluding that "I thought I didn't need you anymore."

The singer seems nonplussed about the album's complexity, insisting that the band simply want to perform "a social function of just giving people something emotive, lively, spirited". He's quick to stress that, despite the title, it's "not an album about being off your tits". Rather, it's an attempt to encapsulate all "heightened emotional states", including "drugs, love, anxiety and pressure".

It's an objective in stark contrast to the newfound stability of Shogun's personal life, but the songs that feature on *High* were all written during a "pretty chaotic" period between three and five years ago. The album is the singer's attempt to "seal that [time] off" and create a "schizophrenic, disgusting, extreme, confusing album because that's basically what [my] life was sort of like at the time".

And yet Shogun's opinion of the final product continues to waver. He initially considered the compositions "sloppy and just totally worthless", yet now is more concerned that fans will be caught off guard by the varied spectrum of styles. It's an indecisiveness he finally abandons as he drains the last dregs of his beer, gets his coat and parts with a final statement. "Fuck making the same record again." 🍌



THE CALM BEFORE THE CHAOS
Shogun serenades the Sydney Opera House crowd.

"socially awkward" private reality. Looking back, he now concedes that his "very erratic, very impulsive and very emotional" nature was easily seduced into the surrounding hedonistic lifestyle, creating a volatile situation that, more often than not, has been detrimental to the band's creative progress. "I think I was already like that as a person and then being an entertainer exacerbates it."

INITALLY, ROYAL HEADACHE BELIEVED their career would amount to their debut 7-inch and a couple of shows. Yet by 2010, following a continual run of live performances in Sydney and interstate, Royal Headache were set to release their debut album.

The self-titled LP, produced by Mikey Young with Eddy Current Suppression Ring – a band whose second album, *Primary Colours*, Hall credits with having

hours of takes," he says. "That's Shogun, the perfectionist."

Even after that painstakingly laboured process, Shogun publicly criticised the album upon its release. The frontman was so displeased with the final result it took him "a year or two to be able to listen to it". He now confesses to being "happy with it", yet is still quick to spray the LP with discrediting labels such as "frisky" and "bright", before settling on "beach volleyball sound" as the final ambiguous descriptor. It's criticism that has been seemingly adopted by his bandmates as a motivator for avoiding creative stagnancy.

"What makes me the happiest is that when we first started, the band could only play really scrappy, thrashy sort of fast, garagey punk stuff," Shogun enthuses. "Now they're handling all sorts of stuff."

FROM RUSH

WORKING MEN

Lifeson, Lee and Peart (from left) in April, Los Angeles



**IS THIS THE END OF THE ROAD
FOR THE GEEK-ROCK GODS?**

BY BRIAN HIATT

PHOTOGRAPH BY
PEGGY SIROTA

WITH LOVE

NEIL PEART DRIVES LIKE HE DRUMS. ON A bright mid-April afternoon in Los Angeles, fresh from a rehearsal with his band, Rush, for what might be their last big tour, he powers his pristine, silver, *Goldfinger*-style 1964 Aston Martin DB5 onto an exit ramp off the 405 at highway speed, slowing not at all – speeding up, maybe – into a sharp, perilous curve. Call it the way of the Peart: daunting technical mastery paired with a penchant for the gloriously excessive. ★ Peart plays an outsize role in Rush, writing the lyrics, serving as the band's designated conscience, taking solos so lengthy and structured that they get their own song titles. To a certain breed of

rock musician, the drummer is a Clapton-in-'66-level god: Dave Grohl wept after meeting him.

Peart is also an amateur auto racer, and something of an off-ramp connoisseur. "Racetracks are designed to make it as difficult as possible to get around that corner fast," he says over the Aston Martin's growl, hands tight on the wheel as he whips through the turn. "And some ramps, by necessity, are that way too. I've been picking out a few favourites – the ramp to Wilshire on the 405 is awesome."

At 62, Peart resembles an off-brand Tom Hanks, with a prominent, florid nose and alert brown eyes. He is tall, dressed in a black T-shirt, black khakis and Prada sneakers; he has ropy, muscled forearms and an athlete's physical ease, despite growing up as a self-described weakling. He is a good deal more personable than you'd expect of a guy who wrote the lyrics to rock's premier anti-schmoozing anthem, "Limelight" ("I can't pretend a stranger is a long-awaited friend"), delivering crisp, all-but-indented paragraphs in a rich baritone. A rigorous autodidact and a gifted, near-graphomaniacal writer, he has penned so many books, essays and lyrics that he can't help deploying conversational footnotes: "When I wrote about that, I said..."

Peart's fans consider him rock's greatest living drummer, and his peers seem to agree: He's won prizes in *Modern Drummer's* annual readers' poll 38 times. And even those allergic to the spectacle of inhuman chops unleashed upon gleaming, rotating, 20-piece-plus drum kits might consider Peart's talent for rhythmic composition and drama: Rush fans know that his hypersyncopated beats and daredevil fills are pop hooks in their own

right. "Neil is the most air-drummed-to drummer of all time," says former Police drummer Stewart Copeland, Peart's friend, musical influence and occasional jam partner, who points to a core sense of groove beneath the flashiness: "Neil pushes that band, which has a lot of musicality, a lot of ideas crammed into every eight bars – but he keeps the throb, which is the important thing. And he can do that while doing all kinds of cool shit."

"I SET OUT TO NEVER BETRAY THE VALUES OF MY 16-YEAR-OLD SELF," SAYS PEART. "A COMPROMISE IS WHAT I CAN NEVER ACCEPT."

Neil Peart likes to ask himself a couple of key questions. One is "What is the most excellent thing I can do today?" The answers lead him to travel between Rush's shows on a BMW motorcycle instead of a plane or bus (creating scheduling nightmares for the band's management), and to embark upon extracurricular bicycle trips through West Africa and China and Europe. He aims to fill every minute of his life with as much much-ness as possible, which may also help explain all those 32nd notes.

The other query, posed in the face of any moral dilemma, is "What would my 16-year-old self do?" Teenage Neil was a brainy misfit in a middle-class suburb

an hour and a half from Toronto who permed his hair, who took to wearing a cape and purple boots on the city bus, who scrawled "God is dead" on his bedroom wall, who got in trouble for pounding out beats on his desk during class. His teacher's idea of punishment was to insist that he bang on his desk nonstop for an hour's worth of detention, time he happily spent re-creating Keith Moon's parts from *Tommy*. For years, Peart wore a piece of one of Moon's shattered cymbals around his neck, retrieved from a Toronto stage after a Who concert, and his current drum kit includes a sample trigger bearing the Who's old bull's-eye logo.

In their early years, opening for practically every major band of the 1970s, Peart and his bandmates – singer-bassist Geddy Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson – were disturbed by what the drummer would later describe as the "sound of salesmen". "We would hear them give the same rap to the audience every night," says Peart. "'This is the greatest rock city in the world, man!' That was creepy. I despise the cynical dishonesty." They did get along with the guys in Kiss. "We would get high with Ace Frehley in his hotel room and make him laugh," Lee recalls, "and they were a really good influence on us in terms of learning to put on a show."

They were taken aback, however, by Gene Simmons' and Paul Stanley's unabashed view of Kiss as a product. "I don't want to knock them," says Peart. "But once I was in a little restaurant in Kansas, and a guy with Kiss Army tattoos kept playing Kiss songs on the jukebox. He believed in a marketing campaign, swallowed it as religion. He was like a convert to Scientology."

Ultimately, Peart wants the freaky, purist kid he once was to be proud of him. "It's about being your own hero," he says. "I set out to never betray the values that 16-year-old had, to never sell out, to never bow to the man. A compromise is what I can never accept."

RUSH HAVE SPENT 41 YEARS MASTERING the art of no compromise. They've superserved their superfans while pretty much ignoring everyone else, and it's all worked out pretty well. There are weirder bands and there are bigger bands, but none quite so weird and quite so big. In each date of their current arena tour, Rush run through their catalogue in reverse order, so nearly all of the show's second half is devoted to their Seventies work, showcasing the band in its purest, oddest, arguably most awesome form.

Back then, they had songs so epic that they actually continued from one album to the next, including, memorably, "Cygnus X-1: Book One: The Voyage". They had Lee nailing fierce bass-guitar parts

Senior writer BRIAN HIATT wrote the Stevie Nicks cover story in RS 761.



while shrieking like he had an overdrive pedal in his throat, hitting notes that made Robert Plant sound like Leonard Cohen. They had Peart pairing polyrhythms with polysyllables, and Lifeson summoning proto-thrash riffs, classical-gas acoustic bits, ringing chords and increasingly outré leads. They were brasher and louder than their stately prog forebears, Yes and Genesis: Rush sometimes sounded like they had formed their entire style around that one heavy bit in the latter act's "Watcher of the Skies". "We were young," says Peart, quoting himself, inevitably, "and foolish and brave and fun."

As the Eighties approached, Rush discovered concision and synthesizers, recording taut songs that jumped straight into the classic-rock canon: "The Spirit of Radio", "Freewill", "Tom Sawyer", "Lime-light". "When punk and New Wave came," says Peart, "we were young enough to gently incorporate it into our music, rather than getting reactionary about it – like other musicians who I heard saying, 'What are we supposed to do now, forget how to play?' We were fans enough to go, 'Oh, we want that too.' And by [1981's] *Moving Pictures*, we nailed it, learning how to be seamlessly complex and to compact a large arrangement into a concise statement."

Even as their hair got shorter and skinny ties appeared, Rush remained militant about power-trio purity: Lee multitasked, holding down bass and vocals while also

GRAND DESIGNS

Peart, Lee and Lifeson on tour in 1976. "We're never mean to each other," says Lee. "If we disagree, we pout. That's the Canadian way."

using every available limb to play synthesizers and trigger backing parts – a feat that pushed virtuosity into the realm of circus act. "Every rehearsal, I was screaming, 'I can't do it!'" says Lee. "But it just felt wrong to have another dude onstage with us. We talked about it all the time – we still talk about it! But it's a no-go zone, can't do it." They had their rules, and they kept to them – Peart wouldn't even play the same drum fill more than once in a song.

Rush have had the same lineup for four decades, since Peart stepped in for their original drummer, John Rutsey – a Bad Company fan who was averse to both odd time signatures and U.S. tours – just after the recording of their first album. They've scarcely had an argument the whole time. "We're never mean to each other," says Lee, "so if we disagree, we pout. That's sort of the Canadian way. But we did used to love punching Alex when he said something stupid."

"If any of us were the slightest bit less stable," says Peart, "the slightest bit less disciplined or less humorous or more mean, or in any way different, it wouldn't have worked. So there's a miracle there."

Lately, Rush have been moving ever closer to pop culture's centre, with a hit documentary, *Rush: Beyond the Lighted Stage*, and a 2013 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. But the end is in sight – sort of, maybe. Rush let their manager, Ray Danniels, include a press-release line noting that their current run of dates will "most likely be their last major tour of this magnitude" – a very Canadian version of the splashy farewell outing that promoters wanted. "It's most likely our last tour," says Lee. "I can't say for sure. But it doesn't mean we don't want to work together still, it doesn't mean we won't do another creative project, and I've got ideas for shows we could do that don't involve a tour."

"I don't think we're having much difficulty thinking about it as possibly the last," adds Lifeson, 61, who has health issues and wants to spend time with his grandkids.

Peart has disliked touring since their first month on the road, in 1974, threatening to become a studio-only player as early as 1989. But the drummer's concerns have grown more acute. For one, he's pained by long separations from his five-year-old daughter, Olivia. They're close enough for him to know the name of every character on her favourite cartoon, *Bubble Guppies*. "I realised on the last tour that it's good for her when I'm there, and it's really bad for her when I'm not," says Peart, who moved from his native Canada to L.A. around the turn of the century. Peart and his wife of 15

years, Carrie Nuttall, don't plan on informing Olivia about the tour until the week before it begins. Peart is worried about how she'll react.

As Peart gets deeper into his sixties, he's also questioned his continued physical ability to play Rush shows, a task he's compared to "running a marathon while solving equations". But so far, he's surprising himself. "Everything hurts, but that's fine," he says. "I'm just gratified that I can still do it – at not only the level I would wish to but still getting better."

EARLIER THAT MORNING, THE three members of Rush arrive at Mates Studios, a squat, U-shaped, warehouselike structure in unglamorous Van Nuys that's been a go-to arena-band rehearsal spot since the late Eighties. In a brick-walled room, a Guitar Center's worth of gear awaits them, along with a big black rug

sistence on doing a month of solo preparation before group practices begin, telling him he's the only man on Earth who "rehearses to rehearse" – now they all do the same. Lifeson, who lives within walking distance of Lee in Toronto, has the simplest method: He blasts Rush songs in his home studio and plays along.

Today, Rush are running through the first set, which begins with songs from their most recent album, *Clockwork Angels*. It's an adventurous concept LP, complete with a full-circle return to sci-fi motifs that Peart had long abandoned. Their producer, Nick Raskulinecz, grew up on the band, and pushed them to embrace their Rush-iest aspects, urging Lee to use his highest vocal register, encouraging Peart to throw a drum solo right in the middle of a twisty track called "Headlong Flight".

Playing that song now, Peart is hitting his snare drum so hard that the skin be-

and vigorous use – the guys in those photos may have a bit more traditional rock & roll mystique, but when it comes to oral hygiene, Rush wins.

After lunch, the set list keeps moving back in time, hitting one of Rush's best songs, 1982's "Subdivisions". The lament of a teenager trapped in the suburbs, it was a lyrical breakthrough for Peart, trading fantasy and philosophising for unadorned emotion. "Nowhere is the dreamer or the misfit so alone," Lee intones, over ominous marching synths and a beat that fights against itself, mirroring the narrator's struggle. "Conform or be cast out!"

Long ago, I was a suburban teenage Rush fan, *Roll the Bones* tour tee and all. It is an intense experience, all these years later, to have the band a few metres in front of me, playing that particular song straight into my earphones. "Growing up, it all seems so one-sided," Lee sings, stabbing at a keyboard, his bass hanging at his waist. "Opinions all provided/The future pre-decided." As discreetly as possible, I wipe my eyes – Grohl, for one, would understand.

"A lot of the early fantasy stuff was just for fun," Peart says later. "Because I didn't believe yet that I could put something real into a song. 'Subdivisions' happened to be an anthem for a lot of people who grew up under those circumstances, and from then on, I realised what I most wanted to put in a song was human experience."

"MOST BANDS WERE AFRAID OF RUSH," SAYS A LONGTIME CREW MEMBER. "THEY WERE BEING OUTPLAYED AND HATED IT."

bearing the logo of their R40 Tour. Lee is using 26 different vintage basses on the tour: "the history of the bass on parade". Peart is playing two different drum kits, and for the rehearsals, they're right next to each other. One is his gold-plated current setup, with laser-etched logos from late-era Rush albums; the other, for the old songs, is a precise re-creation of his circa-1978 chrome kit, complete with the naked dude from the *2112* back cover on the kick drum.

Peart, who is wearing his usual on-stage hat, a rounded African-style model, finds the old gear challenging. He's a fluid and relaxed drummer now, but was a clenched, scowling presence behind the cymbals in the old days. "This is all thought out, everything comfortable," he says, gesturing to his new kit. "I can play without looking. The old kit, everything's stupid – like *I* was at that time. 'Ride cymbal over there? That makes sense!'"

Lee shows off his bass-pedal rig, which is really a sort of foot-synth, laid out like piano keys. "Sometimes it's a keyboard," he says. "Sometimes it's a sound-effects machine. Like I don't have enough to do. Dance, monkey boy, dance!"

The opening date of the tour, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is only three weeks away. "We're still not very good," says Lifeson. "But we're practicing!"

"We're practicing our mistakes," adds Lee. They used to tease Peart about his in-

neath his jaw vibrates. Lee, in dark jeans and a faded T-shirt, plays serpentine lines on a green Fender bass with no apparent effort; Lifeson, in looser, lighter jeans and a grey sweat-wicking tee, is in his own world at stage right, nailing a tricky chord barrage. By the end, Peart is red-faced and wiping himself down with a towel.

The band has a harder time with the heavy instrumental "The Main Monkey Business", bungling the ending. "Close," Lee says.

"Two out of three got it right," says Peart. ("You can't have that in a three-piece band," he notes later.)

"I came in all right and then it got mixed up," Lifeson laments. "There's like a stupid fucking beat put in."

They eat lunch in a break room, where Lifeson, who's attempting a low-carb regimen ("I've always been partial to the protein thing – except when I eat carbohydrates"), opts for a steak. "You're going to sleep through the rest of the set," says Peart, who picks a lighter entree, but then inhales a bowl of ice cream: Drumming burns a lot of calories.

On the yellowish-orange wall are striking portraits of Jeff Beck, Alice Cooper, Prince and Rush's old tourmates Kiss, along with a reproduction of John Entwistle's cover art for *The Who by Numbers*. As the meal ends, a roadie drops off both dental floss and little gum-cleaning sticks, which Lee and Lifeson put to immediate

THIS NEXT SONG FEATURES Minnie Mouse," Geddy Lee informs an empty arena in Tulsa, Oklahoma, adopting a squeaky falsetto. It's a dress rehearsal a couple of weeks later, and Rush just finished the surging 1977 song suite "Xanadu", with both Lee and Lifeson wielding double-necks (Lifeson named one of his "Heavy" and the other one "Bastard"), and Lee attempting high notes that seemed both easy and in excellent taste when he was 23. "You have to get over yourself and just say, 'Well, OK, I'll just get into the period,'" Lee says offstage. "I didn't really know what I was doing back then. I was just kind of screaming. It took me, like, 10 years to learn that there are some keys that are better to sing in."

For all his self-deprecation, Lee is an unexpectedly formidable presence – trim, youthful-looking, unflappably self-possessed, with a hint of steel lurking beneath his affability. "He can be intimidating because he's so smart, and such a man of the world," says Raskulinecz, producer on Rush's past two albums. "In my experience, Geddy is the leader of the band." With his shoulder-length hair, distinctive nose and John Lennon glasses, he's certainly the most recognisable member – even with a cap pulled low, fans interrupt him a good 20 times as we try

to take in a minor-league baseball game in Tulsa.

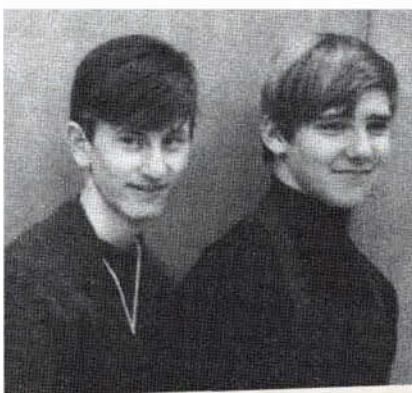
Lee would have no trouble keeping busy without Rush – he and his wife, Nancy Young, have homes in London and Toronto, and spend a lot of time travelling. He is a serious collector of many things, including art, wine and baseballs. But he is a lot less eager to retire from the road than his bandmates. “I’m definitely the most gung-ho about working,” he says. “With me, mixing is a nightmare – the guys have to rip the fucking thing out of my hands because I keep trying to make it perfect. I love putting shows together, I love playing for people, so I don’t have any doubts in that area. The other guys do have doubts, and they have other demands on their lives that I don’t have.”

“I look at Ged and I see a man who’s 10 years younger than his birth certificate says,” says manager Danniel. “And the other two guys are what their birth certificate says.”

Lee takes note of slights against his band, though his score-settling is gentle. Aerosmith were notably ungenerous to Rush in their opening-act days, denying them soundchecks and lowering their onstage volume. “Most bands were afraid of Rush,” says longtime lighting director Howard Ungerleider. “They were being outplayed, and they hated it.” During Aerosmith’s early-Eighties struggles, the Joe Perry Project opened for an ascendant Rush, and as Ungerleider recalls, Lee told his crew to treat Perry generously, to let him soundcheck as much as he wanted. As the story goes, Lee then stopped by Perry’s dressing room to ask if he was being treated well. When Perry said yes, Lee replied, “Good. Because I would never want anyone to feel the way we did when we opened for you.” (Lee doesn’t recall this precise exchange but says Perry apologised.)

It was Lee who pushed hardest for Rush’s Eighties transformation, after hitting prog overload with 1978’s *Hemispheres*. Among other problems, they wrote and recorded the backing music for the entire album without checking whether Lee could sing over it. “We wrote it in such a fucked-up key,” he says, his frustration still fresh 37 years later. “It was just the worst two weeks of my life recording vocals.”

After that album – which kicked off with the meandering, 18-minute-long second part of “Cygnus,” with Lee singing stuff like “As a disembodied spirit/I am



PRE-LIMELIGHT

Top: Lee (left) and Lifeson at Toronto’s Fisherville Junior High School. Above: 16-year-old Peart in his childhood bedroom.

dead and yet unborn” – the frontman told Peart and Lifeson that Rush needed to start over. “I said, ‘Look, in a way we are becoming formulaic, just like all these bands that we can’t stand,’” he says. “We do the overture thing, and then we do this theme and that theme. So we said, ‘What if we take six minutes and try to do something that’s more tuneful but is still fucked up, with really complicated musical moments that have a different energy?’ That’s when we started ‘Spirit of Radio’ and those kinds of songs.”

Lee has been friends with Alex Lifeson since they were nerdy teens in the Sixties. The guitarist set Lee up with Young, whom he married in 1976. Clearly, Lee has no issues with commitment, though touring strained his relationship with his family until Rush cut out European dates in the

Eighties. “The worst thing you can do in marriage is to look at your partner as your wife or your husband,” says Lee. “We decided to treat each other as if we were still boyfriend and girlfriend. That subtle bit of semantics helps a lot, I think.”

Lee, born Gary Lee Weinrib, is the child of Holocaust survivors, and he traces some of his drive to his parents’ legacy. They met in a Polish work camp around 1941, and had fallen in love by the time they were both imprisoned in Auschwitz. “They were, like, 13 years old,” Lee says over a late-night beer in a sleepy Tulsa bar, “so it was kind of surreal preteen shit. He would bribe guards to bring shoes to my mum.” As the war went on, his mother was transferred to Bergen-Belsen, and his father to Dachau.

When the Allies liberated the camps, his father set out in search of his mum. He found her at Bergen-Belsen, which had become a displaced-persons camp. They married there, and immigrated to Canada. But years of forced labour had damaged Lee’s father’s heart, and he died at age 45, when Lee was 12. Lee’s mother had to go to work, leaving her three kids in the care of their overwhelmed, elderly grandmother. “Had my dad survived,” says Lee, “I might not be sitting here talking to you – because he was a tough guy, and if he didn’t want

me to do something, I may not have done it. It was a terrible blow that I lost him, but the course of my life changed because my mother couldn’t control us.”

Lee turned his basement into a band-practice space, even though his grandma’s kitchen was down there too. “My grandma hated it,” recalls Lee’s younger brother, Allan Weinrib, a video producer and documentarian who’s in charge of Rush’s elaborate tour videos. “That was not a good situation at all. One time, it was literally so loud that it rattled glasses off the shelves, which shattered into her chicken soup.”

Lee’s mother was devastated when her son announced that he was dropping out of high school to play rock & roll. In some ways, he’s still making it up to her. “All the shit I put her through,” says Lee, “on top of the fact that she just lost her husband. I felt like I had to make sure that it was worth it. Like, why did I do all that to her? I wanted to show her that I was a professional, I was working hard, that I wasn’t just a fuckin’ lunatic.”

The memory of Lee’s father is a driving force in its own right. “My dad missed all

the fun," he says. "All that work and all that grief, and he got ripped off at an early age. I think that's why I just want to keep playing, and also why I travel so much. While I have my faculties, I want to enjoy everything there is, see as much as I can, just make the most of life."

BACK IN L.A., PEART STOPS AT A traffic light and spots a sad-eyed, sunburned woman begging by the side of the road. He makes a habit of giving to the homeless ("People ask, 'Why don't they just get a job?' They couldn't get a job"), so he asks me to hand the woman 20 bucks. "I'll pay you right back," he says.

"Thank you so much!" she says. "Now, what kind of car is this?"

Peart arrives at a gated little building a couple of kilometres from his home that doubles as an office and a garage for his vintage-car collection. In addition to the Aston Martin, he owns a Jaguar E-Type, a Corvette, a Maserati convertible and a Lamborghini Miura, all from the Sixties and all silver, save for the Lambo, which is banana-yellow. "I call them the silver surfers," he says. "Because all they do is drive up and down the coast."

He pours us each a glass of Macallan 12, on the rocks. (When the jazz drummer Peter Erskine, who has given Peart lessons in recent years, asked his student if he applies ice after Rush concerts, Peart replied, "Yeah, I apply ice to my whiskey.") We settle on a couch in the corner by his plain metal desk, where a plaque reads IT IS WHAT IT IS. The nearby coffee table is stacked with copies of Peart's 2014 travelogue, *Far and Near*, a recent *Clockwork Angels* comic-book adaptation and a booklet commemorating the adventures of his racing team, Bangers N' Mash. The walls are covered with car posters and photos Peart has taken on his travels.

In the Seventies, Peart rankled the rock press with an affinity for libertarian hero Ayn Rand – he cited her "genius" in liner notes, and critics promptly labelled Rush fascists. Rush's breakthrough mini-rock opera, 1976's *2112*, is, in part, a riff on Rand's sci-fi novel *Anthem*. There's nothing wildly controversial about *2112*'s pro-individuality message: It's hard to imagine anyone siding with the bad guys who want to dictate "the words you read/The songs you sing/The pictures that give pleasure to your eyes". But Rush's earlier musical take on Rand, 1975's unimaginatively titled "Anthem", is more problematic, railing against the kind of generosity that Peart now routinely practices: "Begging hands and bleeding hearts will/ Only cry out for more." And "The Trees", an allegorical power ballad about mauling a forest by agitating for

"equal rights" with lofty oaks, was strident enough to convince a young Rand Paul that he had finally found a right-wing rock band.

Peart outgrew his Ayn Rand phase years ago, and now describes himself as a "bleeding-heart libertarian", citing his trips to Africa as transformative. He claims to stand by the message of "The Trees", but other than that, his bleeding-heart side seems dominant. Peart just became a U.S. citizen, and he is unlikely to vote for Rand Paul, or any Republican. Peart says that it's "very obvious" that Paul "hates women and brown people" – and Rush sent a cease-and-desist order to get Paul to stop quoting "The Trees" in his speeches.

"For a person of my sensibility, you're only left with the Democratic party," says

"A LOT OF THE EARLY FANTASY STUFF WAS FOR FUN," SAYS PEART, "BECAUSE I DIDN'T BELIEVE I COULD PUT SOMETHING REAL INTO A SONG."

Peart, who also calls George W. Bush "an instrument of evil". "If you're a compassionate person at all. The whole healthcare thing – denying mercy to suffering people? What? This is Christian?"

Peart himself is not a Christian, having doubted the existence of God since he was a small child: "I sang the hymns and I read the Bible stories, but I was always perplexed, like, 'Really? Jesus wants you for a sunbeam? For a what?'" In explicitly atheistic songs like "Freewill", he mocked those who "choose a ready guide in some celestial voice". And 1991's "Roll the Bones" posits a chillingly random cosmos, where unlucky children are "born only to suffer": "We go out in the world and take our chances/Fate is just the weight of circumstances.... Why are we here?/Because we're here/Roll the bones."

Peart has softened on his unblinkered rationalism in the past couple of decades, especially in the face of unbearable twin tragedies. On August 10th, 1997, Peart's 19-year-old daughter, Selena, died in a single-car accident on the long drive to her university in Toronto. Just five months later, Selena's mother – his common-law wife, Jackie – was diagnosed with terminal cancer, quickly succumbing. "Jackie

received the news almost gratefully," Peart wrote in his harrowing memoir of that time, *Ghost Rider*. Peart told his bandmates to consider him retired, and he embarked on a solitary motorcycle trip across the United States, seeking meaning and solace.

Peart remarried in 2000 and reunited with Rush by 2001. But "Roll the Bones" came to mind more than once in his years of darkness. "God, that song," he says, over dinner at a Brazilian steakhouse near his home. "What it came to represent. I mean, 'Why does it happen?' When something really shitty happens, of course immediately you look to why. I went all supernatural: 'Somebody must have put a curse on me, I must have done something really horrible, God must be mad at me.' I had to sift through all of that shit again looking for meaning."

But he still prefers the "because it happens" explanation to the one where fate's horrors are all part of some divine plan. "Do yourself a favour," he says. "Don't ever say to me, 'Everything happens for a reason.' 'Cause you'll be dead."

Peart suddenly remembers that he was going to repay me the 20 bucks from earlier. I wave him off, saying I'd rather keep the karma. "Yeah, right, ha ha, karma," he says. "Again, that's something I used to believe in. Every Christmas I had pages of charities that I contributed to, and I would show my daughter who we're giving to and why, as a karma thing." He looks me in the eye. "Until I found out it didn't work."

"Finding generosity again was a huge gift," he adds. "Because I had a time where I was like, 'I hate everybody. Why are you still alive? You should be dead.' And then I said, 'If I'm gonna live, I'm not gonna be that guy.'"

CLOSE TO MIDNIGHT, WITH Rush's tour kickoff less than 24 hours away, Alex Lifeson is kneeling on a relocated couch pillow by the open window of his hotel room, exhaling pungent weed smoke into the humid Tulsa air. (If you're in Rush and you want to get high, you do so considerably.) He breaks into a violent coughing fit. "Well, that's the thing with this pot these days," he says, passing the joint. "It's so expansive in your lungs." The streets below us are post-apocalyptically empty. "It's busy in town tonight," Lifeson says.

Earlier that night, over a pleasantly boozy dinner, I ask Lifeson if weed has helped him write Rush's music. "Maybe just 80 per cent of the time," he says, roaring. "I find that smoking pot can be a really great creative agent." (Lee quit pot in the early Eighties; Peart says, "I like marijuana, but I'm not going to be the poster

child for it.”) “But when you’re in the studio and you’re playing, it’s sloppy,” Lifeson continues. “And cocaine is the worst, for everything. If you want to feel your heart pounding on your mattress at 7:00 in the morning when the birds are chirping, it’s perfect. It’s awesome. What do kids do now for drugs?”

Lifeson was a fan of Ecstasy in the early Nineties, and hadn’t heard that it’s called Molly now. “I’m glad you told me, just in case,” he jokes. “My wife is a totally non-drug person, but for some reason I talked her into it. We cranked the music and we were dancing, and then we talked for hours

animal than his bandmates. “He is nothing if not spontaneous,” says Lee. “He’s one of the most underrated guitarists – for years, he would never show up in any of the guitar polls. I think ‘cause so much of his brilliance is so subtle, like his invention of chords, and his unusual choice of notes.”

Lifeson has faced some serious health crises. He receives injections for psoriatic arthritis, and he was hospitalised for anemia from bleeding ulcers a few years ago, receiving blood transfusions. For years, too, he had considerable trouble breathing, feeling like he could never

THE NEXT NIGHT, RUSH FINALLY launch their tour, and all of their meticulous rehearsal is immediately thwarted by their fans’ enthusiasm: The crowd is so crazily loud that the bandmates can’t hear themselves in their monitors. “All our settings became obsolete,” Lee says, cheerfully enough, between sips of champagne in a black-curtained backstage room after the show. As is his habit, Peart zipped off on his motorcycle the moment they finished, but the other guys and the crew stayed behind to celebrate.

“Months of preparation meant nothing,” Lifeson adds with a shrug.

But they appreciated the fervour. “There was a guy in the second row during ‘Xanadu,’” says Lee. “I thought his head was gonna pop off and roll away. He couldn’t fucking contain himself! I thought he was gonna have a heart attack.”

During the show, Lee introduced the *Permanent Waves* track “Jacob’s Ladder” as “a song we’ve never played live”. “Ged is never wrong,” says his brother – but in this case he was, flagrantly so: Not only had Rush played the song, as fans instantly pointed out online, it’s on a live LP, 1981’s *Exit...Stage Left*. Lee can’t quite believe he made this flub; perched on a couch, he begins looking up Rush trivia on his phone. “I fucked up,” he says, eventually. “I have no memory of ever playing ‘Jacob’s Ladder.’”

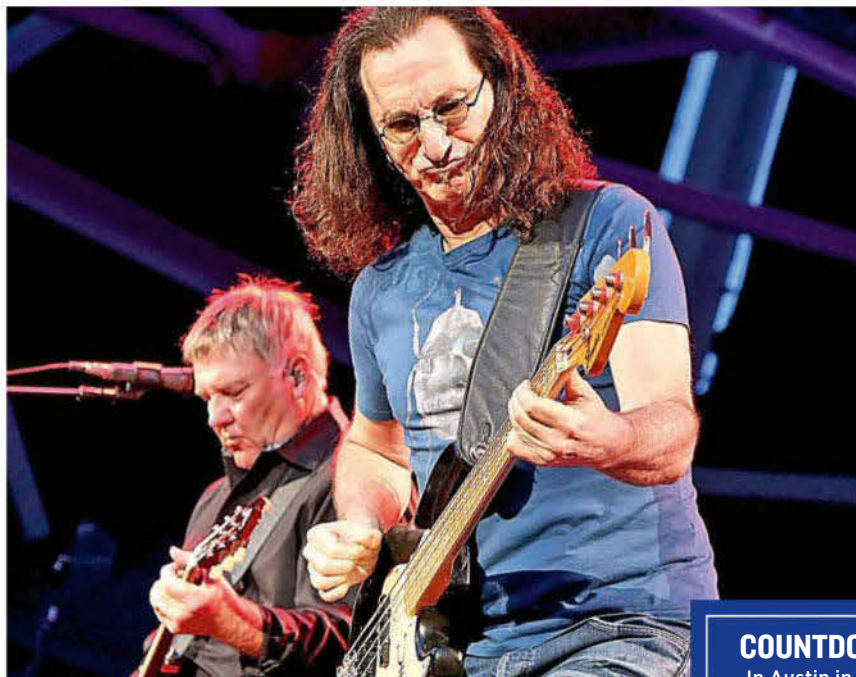
Lifeson takes on the voice of an aggrieved fan: “I fucking hate these guys! They’re liars!”

I suggest that Lee continue to tell crowds that they’ve never played the song, just to drive the fans nuts. He warms to the idea. “I should say, ‘People are insisting we played this before – they’re full of shit!’”

Lifeson does a Cartman-as-Geddy voice: “I’m Geddy Lee, and if I say we didn’t play it before, we didn’t play it before!”

They’re still enjoying themselves, these old friends, and it suddenly feels unthinkable that this is the end. Peart seemed nearly giddy onstage, throwing in extra stick twirls, breaking into a wide grin during “Xanadu”. It turns out his daughter reacted better than he’d imagined to the news of the tour. “I think Neil is feeling more optimistic,” says Lee, “because everything seems easier than he expected.”

For his part, Lee couldn’t bring himself to end the show with a real goodbye. “Thank you for 40 amazing years, we so appreciate it,” he yelped, after the band completed its backward journey with its first hit, “Working Man”. Just before leaving the lighted stage, Lee peered out from behind his glasses at 19,000 expectant faces and offered a tiny bit of solace: “We hope to see you again sometime.”



COUNTDOWN

In Austin in May. “It’s most likely our last tour,” says Lee. “I can’t be sure.”

about deep personal stuff for what seemed like the first time, even though we’d been married for years. We were going through a bit of a difficult time in our relationship, and that opened up a lot of doors.”

Like Lee, Lifeson is the son of immigrants, in his case from Yugoslavia. At 16, he got his girlfriend, Charlene, pregnant with their first child (they married five years later, and are still together) – which added some urgency to succeed with the early incarnation of Rush. “It was certainly a concern,” he says. “But I always had a backup in plumbing.” He channels his dad’s Slavic accent: “‘You could make good money in plumbing!’ I used to go with him on jobs. He’d pick me up after a bar gig at 1:30, then I’d go work with him through the night on some plumbing job till 8:00 in the morning. Then he’d take me home and then he’d go to work.”

In keeping with his personality – perhaps best demonstrated by a Hall of Fame acceptance speech that consisted entirely of the words “blah blah blah” – Lifeson is a more instinctual and untamed musical

quite fill his lungs. When he underwent recent ulcer surgery, his doctor discovered the problem. “My stomach was behind my heart, pushing against my lung,” he says. Everything is now back in place, and he’s thrilled at the prospect of playing shows without gasping for air.

In the hotel room, Lifeson picks up his PRS acoustic guitar – his own signature model – and plays for a long while, eyes closed, seamlessly unwinding a series of chiming, pastoral chords and driving, *Led Zeppelin III*-like riffs. None of it sounds like anything in Rush’s catalogue. “This is what I do,” he says. He did the same last night, returning to his room after a three-hour Rush rehearsal to make more music. “I sat down and played guitar here, drunk and high, for an hour. It’s cool, but it’s kind of crazy. I’m so lucky, honest to God. I can sit and play for hours for my own enjoyment. It has nothing to do with Rush. It’s just a pure exercise of joy.”

HOW SWEET THE SOUND

This month 21 years ago, Jeff Buckley released his debut album, 'Grace'. This is the story of how an unknown singer-songwriter made one of the Nineties' greatest records

By JEFF APTER

'YOU'VE BEEN LISTENING TO Robert Johnson, haven't you?" ¶ Jeff Buckley flashed a smile at his new friend, Michael Tighe. He liked what he had just heard. They were sitting on Tighe's bed; the guitarist had never been in a serious band before, but he was playing Buckley some music for a song he was working on. Buckley, meanwhile, had just signed a recording deal with Columbia Records. ¶ Fast forward to late 1993 and Buckley, his friend Chris Dowd from the band Fishbone and Tighe were in the Sony Studios in New York's Hell's Kitchen, trying to finish some likely B-sides. The main sessions for Buckley's debut album, *Grace*, were done. Tighe's song now had a title – "So Real" – but it didn't have much in the way of lyrics. ¶ "I'm going for a walk around the block," Buckley said, tucking his ever-present notebook under his arm and heading off into the night.

It was very late, around 2am; it seemed as though the session was over. Tighe and Dowd shrugged and hit the local 7/11. But when they returned, Buckley was in the vocal booth, way deep in song – the song Tighe had first played for him in his bedroom. Clearly, something had happened during his nocturnal stroll. Buckley lost himself in the soaring outro that became a highlight of "So Real", and as he brought the song to its powerful, overwhelming climax, Dowd and Tighe looked at each other, lost for words.

"That's in," said Buckley, as he and Tighe shared a cab home. "*That is in*. It's on the album."

Grace was finally complete.

Buckley's debut was both a beginning and an end for the singer. It was the beginning of his "proper" recording career for prestigious label Columbia Records, who had such high hopes that they envisaged a musical bloodline that connect-





Bright Star
Buckley in Atlanta in 1994.
"All my songs come from
poems," he once explained.

ed Buckley with Johnny Cash, Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen. It was also the end of his relatively carefree café days, in which he'd served a musical apprenticeship at the downtown New York café/drop-in centre known as Sin-é. The fun of Sin-é, where Buckley sometimes sang for no-one, or shot the shit with locals while strumming his electric guitar, was over as soon as he signed his Columbia contract in October 1992. This was business. Big major label business. The pressure was on.

Buckley, however, had mixed emotions about signing with Columbia. He understood the star-making power of a major label, something he'd craved since first coming east for the 'Greetings From Tim Buckley' tribute, a musical memorial to his father, staged at Brooklyn's St. Ann's Church on April 26th, 1991. But Buckley also knew how impersonal and destructive major label life could be. He'd heard all about it from his L.A. friend Chris Dowd, as Fishbone had been signed to Sony.

When revered New York guitarist/composer Gary Lucas, who'd worked closely with Buckley at the St. Ann's tribute, tried to introduce him to Sony's David Kahne during an April 1991 visit to the imposing Sony HQ in New York, Buckley refused to shake the exec's hand.

"Why did you do that?" asked an embarrassed Lucas.

Buckley explained he'd been told it was Kahne who'd "ruined" Fishbone's career, despite working closely with the band on their four albums. Clearly, Buckley was conflicted about the business of music.

But eventually he did sign with the label, a three-album deal worth close to a million dollars. Buckley laughed about it nervously, calling the deal "big fucking Michael Jackson money". The goateed, obsessive Steve Berkowitz, who worked in A&R, became Buckley's main "go-to guy" at the label. Berkowitz had seen him perform at Sin-é before signing him, while sipping coffee with Hal Willner, who'd brought Buckley over from the west coast for the St. Ann's show.

As Berkowitz looked on, Buckley walked out from behind the espresso machine, picked up his guitar and began to play. In a New York minute, Berkowitz grabbed Willner's arm. "Hal," he asked, "am I hearing what I'm hearing?"

Berkowitz coined the perfect term to describe Buckley's vocal gymnastics, the moment when he opened his mouth and journeyed into the unknown: "The Flying Buckleys".

Soon enough, the shabby, downbeat Sin-é was swimming in record execs, all in search of Buckley's signature. Some would vent their frustration, demanding to know why they couldn't book a table. Why did they have to queue with the regulars, straight off the street? The venue's laconic owner, Shane Doyle, would laugh and reply, "Because we don't have a phone. And we don't take bookings."

It was a smart move on Columbia's part to introduce Buckley with an EP named *Live at Sin-é*, which was released with little fanfare in November 1993. The four-tracker was a snapshot of a time and place – Buckley learning his craft, early 1990s, downtown New York.

But it also posed a problem for Columbia: What type of artist, exactly, was Buckley? While he played the occasional original at Sin-é, and the EP included early takes on "Mojo Pin" and "Eternal Life", his lengthy sets were littered with covers, everyone from Bob Dylan to Van Morrison, Screamin' Jay Hawkins to "Calling You", the yearning theme song from the recent hit movie *Bagdad Café*. Buckley sang Edith Piaf classics; he transformed himself into Judy Garland. He imitated the Sin-é coffee machine and chatted casually with the regulars while he tuned. There seemed no clear creative plan: was he a singer-songwriter? Or, as he preferred to describe himself, a male "chanteuse"? *Grace* would, hopefully, answer all these questions.

JEFF BUCKLEY MAY HAVE NEVER had a record deal before, but he was no musical novice. He'd learned his craft during the 1980s at the Musicians Institute in L.A., where he specialised in guitar and fusion and advanced musical snobbery – he could play the complicated jazz-rock of Weather Report note for tricky note. As for his family life, it was disorganised at best; he considered himself "rootless trailer trash" and bounced between various addresses in and around the "Orange Curtain" in Or-

JEFF AFTER is the author of *A Pure Drop: The life of Jeff Buckley* and is the Creative Associate for *A State of Grace: The Music of Tim and Jeff Buckley*.

How we wrote 'Mojo Pin' and 'Grace'

By GARY LUCAS

IMET JEFF AT THE 'GREETINGS FROM TIM BUCKLEY' rehearsals. The organiser wanted us to do a song together, "The King's Chain", so I said, "Why don't you come over, I live in the West Village." He came around the next day, I handed him a microphone and he started to sing. My jaw dropped. The wheels started turning in my head, because I had been disappointed [with the current singer in Gods and Monsters]. Not long after things blew up with that singer and we lost our deal with Columbia. So I called Jeff up and he said, "I'll be your singer". In the next few days I was inspired to finish a piece which was "Rise Up To Be", and I wrote this other instrumental called "And You Will". As a title it was meant to encourage Jeff: and you will join me in Gods and Monsters. Later that summer he came over, it was a steamy night in August 1991, and he said, "You know 'Rise Up To Be'? Now it's called 'Grace'. The other one is called 'Mojo Pin'." And he pulled out his book of lyrics. The only thing we had to modify was when we were playing "Grace" he said, "Please repeat this section again, I hear more lyrics." I said, "Jeff, what's a mojo pin?", and he mimed shooting up. I said to myself, I didn't really hear a lyric on there that would have anything to do with heroin, but I was not a censor, and I wasn't going to say, "You can't do that." I just thought, OK, he's a poet. Fine. Maybe it's a metaphor.



SO REAL

Left: Buckley with former Gods and Monsters bandmate, Gary Lucas. Above: In the studio in Miami, remastering "Eternal Life" for a Japanese release. Right: Buckley's band (from left): Matt Johnson, Michael Tighe, Buckley and Mick Grondahl.



ange County, California, with his mother Mary and half-brother Corey. It wasn't long before he hit the road, playing bass in a Commitments touring band and also appearing in the backing band for a reggae toaster named Shinehead. He hung about New York for some time, a period of discovery that he documented in his diary.

"Escaped to NYC in '90 for about seven months, got into hardcore and Robert Johnson," he wrote. Buckley also discovered Pakistani Qawwali great Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, who he proclaimed "my Elvis". His stunning imitation of Ali Khan could silence the noisiest room – he would sometimes do this at Sin-é.

"I got into a few projects at once to make money," Buckley said of his early musical days, "because I shied away from

filling in job applications because you had to fill in details of your high school, your elementary school – there were so many, it was too embarrassing. And to be worth my salt as a musician I had to play all the time, so I did . . . [But] some of the bands were fun."

Buckley's sense of self-mockery was also pretty well developed by this time. He laughed about his unibrow – a Buckley family curse – and referred to himself as the "Monkey Boy King".

When Buckley got a message from Hal Willner about the 'Greetings' tribute, he'd been playing guitar in a Hollywood metal outfit called Group Therapy, fronted by a vibrator-wielding wild child named Kathryn Grimm. Buckley had also started to write; the first draft of "Last Goodbye" was written while he was

camped out on Grimm's couch. He cut a demo, too, funded by Herb Cohen, his father's former manager, which Buckley entitled the *Babylon Dungeon Sessions*. An early version of "Last Goodbye" – then titled "Unforgiven" – was on the tape, along with a prototype of "Eternal Life".

In a letter to a friend from this time, Buckley wrote about his father, Tim, who he only met twice before he died, aged 28, in 1975. "It's obvious that Tim was loved and respected," Buckley noted. "And if he were still around maybe there would be at least one guy who had something real to say . . . I would have liked to have kissed him and told him that everything was OK; everything he'd done was cool. [But] I'm done looking for him."

Then the call came from Willner and Buckley's life changed forever.

Buckley had mixed emotions about signing with Columbia. He knew how impersonal and destructive major label life could be.

BEARSVILLE STUDIO, located in bucolic upstate New York, didn't appear to be the most likely place for the 26-year-old Buckley to record his debut major label album. Buckley had made New York his home. When not filling Sin-é he'd been taking in theatre and performance art events and turning up

at seemingly every downtown gig, soaking up the city's vibrant artistic scene. Buckley had also had his first major relationship in the city, with a woman named Rebecca Moore, who he met at the 'Greetings From Tim Buckley' event.

What Bearsville had going for it was history: the legendary Woodstock festival, "three days of peace and music", had been staged nearby in 1969. Bob Dylan and the Band had got back to the country in Woodstock, creating some true musical magic in the late 1960s. Great records had been made at Bearsville by everyone from Cheap Trick to Alice Cooper, Foreigner and IOCC. But there were other reasons, too, why Sony had booked Bearsville in late September, 1993, something Buckley attested to when a documentary crew visited him as he settled into the countrified surrounds.

"I'm an easily distracted person," he confessed, as he wandered down a rustic Woodstock back road. "So this is great."

This was backed up by producer Andy Wallace in 2002. "Somebody Jeff's age and temperament," he said, choosing his words carefully, "well, there was bound to be significant distractions in the city."

Buckley got along well with Wallace, a man who looked more college professor than rock dog, and a solid choice by Steve Berkowitz as producer for *Grace*. As Buckley's drummer Matt Johnson notes, "Andy was steps ahead of all of us in his experience and competence." Wallace knew Bearsville, too, having already worked there. Wallace knew the room – rooms, in fact.

Before heading to Bearsville, Buckley knew that he wanted to get beyond the "singing jukebox" solo act he'd become at Sin-é. He needed a band; he craved having some "warm bodies" nearby. The two guys he chose would join him for a month for a bit jamming and pre-production in New York's Context studios, before heading north.

The Danish-born Mick Grondahl had met Buckley a few months earlier in the city, which led to a jam at Buckley's apartment and an invitation to record together. (The recording of that jam, known among Buckley-philes as "The Angel Tape", is a much sought-after bootleg.) Twenty-two-year-old relocated Texan Matt Johnson had played for singer Dorothy Scott, who helped Jeff get his Sin-é residency, which led to one of Buckley's mysterious late night phone messages, inviting Johnson to Context to jam with him and Grondahl. Within a few hours of the trio plugging in together for the first time – Johnson had not met the other two guys before – the framework of the track "Dream Brother" started to take shape.

Buckley had his guys. He knew, as he told Grondahl, that they "were down for the ride".

Producer Wallace dropped by Context and got to know Columbia's new rising star. As the band blasted away – and they were still very much getting to know each other, musically and personally – Wallace would quietly sit in a corner, taking notes. At one stage he asked Buckley a question. "Is this song meant to be 15 minutes long?"

"Well, it could be, right?" Buckley grinned.

Speaking some 20 years later, Grondahl, who has since relocated to his native Denmark, recalls their time at Context as a time to "live and breathe music for six weeks. We were all discovering new things and new approaches, new ways to attack the songs, and that kept us going."

Matt Johnson, who these days tours with Angus and Julia Stone, now accepts that "in many respects . . . the record company would likely have preferred a seasoned senior roster of noted

bunked down. Studio A, the main facility, was aircraft-hangar-huge, with a high ceiling. Wallace had arranged a couple of different configurations: an acoustic setup, which was an attempt to make Buckley feel as though he was back at Sin-é, with everything miked. Then there was a second, more traditional configuration where Buckley and band could cut loose.

Almost immediately, he warmed to the acoustics at Bearsville. He sat down, uttered a few words to get a feel for the space and turned to no-one in particular. "This room is awesome."

When not settling into the studio, the intrepid three wandered the grounds, sizing up the neighbourhood. Deer darted around and stopped to drink at a nearby creek. Buckley was a long way from Sin-é, but that was perfectly cool, at least for the time being. He quickly adapted to the bucolic surrounds.

But exactly what music did he have prepared for the *Grace* sessions, as the trees around Bearsville started to explode with what Matt Johnson calls "the most intoxicating" colours imaginable?

As the band blasted away, producer Andy Wallace sat taking notes. "Is this song meant to be 15 minutes long?" he asked.

session musicians to accomplish the task at hand. But one has to start doing this sort of thing somehow, someway.

"The fact that we had yet to 'fall into' a band dynamic meant that there was a collaborative meeting and melding of minds at play. It was inspiration in action, intoxication with the process . . . in this sense, the 'green-ness' of the band was turned from possible con to pro."

"I was dying for the chemistry of a band," Buckley explained at the time. "You know, people, bass, drums, dulcimer, tuba, anything – any way that the band would work out."

The musical firm of Buckley, Grondahl and Johnson had yet to play a proper gig together – or work in a professional studio such as Bearsville – yet now they were on the road to Woodstock.

THERE WAS BIG – AND then there was Bearsville. There were two studios in the complex along with guest cabins, where Buckley and the band

Hard to say. One morning in early October, Buckley woke and got to work, ripping through a take on Focus' prog epic "Hocus Pocus", yodelling like a deranged cowboy. He also tried out the Dylan songs he'd played at Sin-é – "If You See Her, Say Hello" and "Just Like a Woman" – and Screamin' Jay Hawkins' "Alligator Wine". Then there was "Calling You" from *Bagdad Café*, Van Morrison's "Sweet Thing". During his time at Bearsville, Buckley would record close to an album's worth of covers.

During these first sessions, he recorded as many as 30 versions of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" (a song, admittedly, that he'd learned from John Cale's rendition). The final version – which in many ways remains Buckley's biggest musical statement – was pieced together from at least three different takes. While he was working his way through the song – which Buckley believed celebrated "the hallelujah of the orgasm", an "ode to life and love" – a camera crew, hired by his label for a making-of doco, appeared at Bearsville, capturing Buckley's every



How I Shot the LP Cover

By Merri Cyr

"I photographed Jeff for the *Grace* cover in December of 1993 at my friend Billy Basinski's Arcadia loft in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Jeff definitely had his own sense of personal style. The glitter jacket he is wearing is one of his thrift store finds. The shoot went on most of the day – he was a bit nervous because it was the album cover shoot. I wasn't even interested in the shot Jeff chose for the cover. Jeff saw it on a contact sheet and said, 'That's it. That's the cover. I can tell I am listening to music in this shot.' The music he was listening to was Patti Smith's *Horses* album. Later I found out there was quite a bit of controversy about the cover selection. Management didn't like it because they thought the glitter jacket was too effeminate. Others at the company thought the image was too much of a pretty boy shot. Jeff fought very hard and insisted this image be on his cover. It became a big, big thing, and he wouldn't budge."

move. After one particularly enthralling take of the song, when it seemed as though some spirit had briefly possessed Buckley, there was complete silence in the room. Everyone: Wallace, the crew, Sony staff, were speechless. Everyone, that is, except for the singer.

"That was OK," he shrugged, and asked for another take.

WORK WITH THE band began soon after Buckley had exhausted his collection of covers. Guitarist Gary

Lucas, Buckley's early New York mentor and, for a time, bandmate in Gods and Monsters (a loose-knit downtown ensemble that included members of Television and Talking Heads), was invited to Bearsville for three days to work on songs he and Buckley had co-written,

"Mojo Pin" and "Grace". It was now about three weeks into the costly sessions – and sparks really started to fly.

But this wasn't an easy assignment for Lucas. In March, 1992, Buckley insisted upon line-up changes in Gods and Monsters – which Lucas had formed in 1989 – not long after joining the group. The day after a well-received Gods and Monsters show at St. Ann's that same month, Buckley called Lucas at home.

"I'm just not comfortable with this any more," Buckley said, referring to the band he'd just reconfigured. "I just want to work on developing my voice more."

"I felt sick," Lucas recalls, "like he had just stabbed me."

Buckley duly bailed on Lucas, the band and a production deal they had in place with start-up label Imago.

So it was with mixed emotions that Lucas re-united with Buckley at Bearsville; the scars hadn't fully healed. Buck-

ley was inside what Wallace had dubbed "The Writer's Cottage", a pencil in hand, agonising over unfinished lyrics. According to Lucas, he "had the look of a guy who was way, way under pressure". That night, after sharing a few spliffs with Lucas and the band, Buckley excused himself and headed back to his cottage. Clearly, there was more work to be done.

The next day at the studio, Buckley began recording the vocals for the album's title track. Lucas may have seen Buckley make magic in New York, but this was something else altogether: again, it was as if he was possessed. After a soul-stirring vocal take, Buckley emerged from the vocal booth with a sheepish grin on his face.

"Did I do good?" he asked.

"He knew it was fucking great," says Lucas.

As for "Mojo Pin", another song that had come to life in Lucas' New York

apartment a couple of years back, this represented a key moment in the sessions, according to Mick Grondahl. At this point, at least 19 takes had been recorded of “Last Goodbye”; Grondahl also recalls the track “Grace” as “some undertaking” in the studio. Neither came particularly easily. But “Mojo Pin” brought real clarity. “It was fluid, intense and did not feel like a five-minute song.”

That night, Buckley, Johnson and Grondahl drove around Woodstock in a rented red mini-van, the type of vehicle usually favoured by soccer mums, not rock bands. A rough recording of “Mojo

Pin” blared on the van’s stereo. They listened, enthralled by what they’d created. This became their way of “road testing” songs-in-progress.

“It was a really good gauge of what the song was doing,” says Grondahl, “whether it needed anything more.”

Matt Johnson says these nocturnal drives also helped unite the band.

“That was a bonding experience,” he offers. “There was a shared feeling of joy at the creation that was taking shape.”

For Steve Berkowitz, an occasional visitor at Bearsville, “Mojo Pin” was the moment when *Grace* came into sharp

focus, proof Buckley was much more than some “human jukebox”, the king of covers. Berkowitz said the track represented a “volcanic eruption of artistry” from Buckley. He looked on, gob-smacked, as “hundreds” of musical ideas emerged from the singer.

Buckley was now clearly in charge.

YET AFTER FIVE WEEKS at Bearsville, Buckley and the band had nowhere near enough original material for the finished record, having recorded only “Mojo Pin”, “Grace”, “Last Goodbye”, “Lover, You Should’ve Come Over” and “Eternal Life”. All amazing songs, admittedly, but not enough to fill an album.

There was another Buckley original cut at Bearsville, “Forget Her”, which Berkowitz thought would have been a great lead single, but Buckley stubbornly insisted it stay off the finished album, leading to no small amount of friction back at Sony HQ. (It seemed to be a kiss-off to his former girlfriend, Rebecca Moore, perhaps too close to the bone emotionally speaking even for Buckley.)

The singer was always good for an intriguing quote, but wasn’t always clear when it came to explaining his songs. He insisted that “Mojo Pin” was “about a dream”, though he also told Gary Lucas that the term “mojo pin” was a reference to heroin use.

“All my songs come from poems,” Buckley sort of explained. He lugged a notebook with him pretty much wherever he went, scrawling ideas and lyrics in his cramped, left-handed style. “You’re shaping sound to fit a feeling,” he told a reporter when asked about his lyrics. “Words have to be emotionally accurate, you know.”

The turning point for Matt Johnson was the moment Buckley came up with his vocal for “Dream Brother”. While recording the instrumental track, Johnson thought it was “a B-side, at best”. But when he heard Buckley’s vocals, everything changed forever.

“That was an important moment in my life. That was an instant when I could clearly see the transformative power of the human imagination. [It was] totally unexpected, deeply satisfying and delivered with a charismatic conviction that could make the sale.”

Buckley explained that “Dream Brother” was about a friend, who’d “led a rather excessive life”, even though it seemed to refer to his father. A posthumous Tim Buckley album was actually titled *Dream Letter*. Buckley never cleared up this mystery.



A State Of Grace

Bringing the music of Jeff & Tim Buckley to life

IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE THAT THE PRODUCTION *A State of Grace: The Music of Tim and Jeff Buckley* should be premiered in Australia, where Jeff Buckley’s following still borders on the evangelical. It’s also logical that Gary Lucas, who worked so closely with Jeff when he first came to New York in the early 1990s, should be engaged as music director. *A State of Grace*, much like other successful tributes such as *Way To Blue: The Music of Nick Drake*, is built around a broad selection of songs (20, from both Tim and Jeff), a house band (in this case, Gods and Monsters, Lucas’ New York ensemble) and a variety of vocalists. Those vocalists are Martha Wainwright, Steve Kilbey, Casper Clausen (from the Danish group Efterklang), Willy Mason, Cold Specks and Camille O’Sullivan. Kilbey had his first close encounter with the music of Jeff Buckley purely by chance. “I first [over]heard Jeff at a gig,” he recalls. “Someone was playing *Grace* and I was transfixed by the music and his voice – it still has the same effect almost 20 years later.” Adds Lucas: “The music of Jeff and Tim Buckley is timeless and gracefully transcendental. It will continue to reverberate around the globe and seduce new listeners.” *A State Of Grace* debuts in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane in September. See stateofgracelive.com for details.

As for the bounty of covers they'd captured at Bearsville, it was agreed that Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah", Benjamin Britten's "Corpus Christi Carol" and James Shelton's "Lilac Wine" were good enough for the finished LP. They represented, in Buckley's words, a gesture to "link this album to my past". Their inclusion was also out of necessity: Buckley simply didn't have enough originals for the album. ("So Real", the co-write with Michael Tighe, who joined the band for the *Grace* tour, came later, in New York, after the band had completed their work at Bearsville. This was the song that replaced "Forget Her". Buckley cryptically described "So Real" as a track that combined "fuck you" and "I love you".)

Interestingly, Matt Johnson didn't feel that Buckley was experiencing any kind of creative squeeze at Bearsville, despite the shortage of new material. That crisis came later, after *Grace*.

"So far as I know," he says, looking back, "Jeff wasn't under too much pressure to write at that particular time. He could use existing collaborations with Gary, songs he had previously creat-

The turning point was the moment Buckley came up with his vocal for "Dream Brother". Everything changed.

ed, covers and anything that popped up in sessions to complete the album. The songs on *Grace* were all strong and satisfying in and of themselves."

The work at Bearsville ended in late October 1993. Buckley, Grondahl and Johnson returned to the city, satisfied with what they'd achieved, especially so given their relative lack of experience. Buckley flashed back to the lengthy history of such originals as "Last Goodbye" and "Eternal Life", which had been with him since the *Babylon Dungeon* demo back in LA, before he got the call to come east in 1991. He referred to them, at least in their original context, as "loser songs". But not anymore.

"I put them on the album to prove to the songs that they weren't losers. Sort of like finding kids that have been told all their lives that they're pieces of shit and finally you have to go around proving to them that, no, they are worth knowing and loving."

GRACE' KEPT SOME INTERESTING company upon its release in late August, 1994, among them Oasis' emphatic *Definitely Maybe*, *Without a Sound* from slacker rockers Dinosaur Jr and Boyz II Men's *II*. *Grace*, of course, sounded nothing like any of them, or, for that matter, like anything released in the first half of the 1990s.

Critics loved it, especially outside of America: on the year of its release, *NME*, *Mojo*, *Select* and *Q* all listed *Grace* among their top albums of the year, as did French magazine *Les Inrockuptibles*. France soon became, alongside Australia, Buckley's biggest audience. He was likened by critics to Nick Drake, Van Morrison – even his late father Tim, the man he knew only through his music. Peers Eddie Vedder, Chris Cornell and Thom Yorke fell under Buckley's spell, as did more seasoned players such as Jimmy Page – who once tried to entice Buckley to open for Page and Plant, without success – Elvis Costello and Paul McCartney.

Despite all this, as Buckley and his band hit the road for the never-ending tour that would eventually bring them to Australia for the first of two visits in late August 1995, he could have had no idea what lay ahead: an album that people would still speak about in awe some 20 years later, and a life that was tragically cut short in the Mississippi in 1997.

"I can't overemphasize the quality of Jeff's gift," reflects Matt Johnson. "I had always been sensitive to music, but that sensitivity was never party to the type of effects that I perceived with Jeff. Jeff's death, sadly, took from us what was likely his greatest gift: his ability to deeply engage a listener and transform their listening experience."

"It's easy to forget that [*Grace*] was not made in the mindspace of 'destiny,'" he continues. "It was cobbled together by whatever people could find and avail themselves of at the time. And thanks be for that," adds Johnson, "otherwise I'd have fucked it up royally."

Buckley was once asked what he hoped to achieve with the album. He thought the question through carefully before responding.

"Just to make things I never heard before, that say things that I can't say otherwise. Not so much go as far as I can, but to go as deep as I can."

The Fall From 'Grace'

Where are the major players from 'Grace' now?

MATT JOHNSON

Left the music industry for some time after leaving Buckley's band at the end of a set in Australia in 1996, but has since recorded and performed with Rufus and Martha Wainwright, Beth Orton, St. Vincent and Angus and Julia Stone.

MICK GRONDAHL

Went on to play with Elysian Fields and Black Beetle (which featured Joan Wasser), but eventually returned to his native Denmark. He currently teaches music and is working on a novel.

GARY LUCAS

After being plunged into what he described as "indie hell" in the wake of Buckley leaving Gods and Monsters, Lucas has since forged a stellar international career as a guitarist, bandleader and composer. He has been nominated for a Grammy, and his latest project is music director for *A State of Grace: The Music of Tim and Jeff Buckley*.

MICHAEL TIGHE

Played in Black Beetle before forming The A.M. in 2002. In 2006, he covered Britney Spears' "Toxic" with Mark Ronson, a minor hit in the UK. He's currently recording a solo EP, *The Garage Band Sessions*.

BEARSVILLE

The complex was sold in 2004 and is now a private residence.

'GRACE' TRACK BY TRACK

A cast of Australian and international musicians pick their favourite song from the seminal LP

1 Mojo Pin

KATIE NOONAN



THE FIRST TIME I HEARD Jeff Buckley my world stopped. Never had I heard such earnest, raw and pungent beauty. I also remember feeling relief that music like that could exist, as I was beginning to dream my own sonic world and he gave me hope! "Mojo Pin" was the soundtrack to my first serious make-out session/"sleepover" with my then new boyfriend, now husband of over 10 years, Zac. We were lying on the floor of my share house bedroom listening to the live version (*Live at Wetlands*) and it is so, so seriously sexy: "Love turn me on/let me turn you all over/with my thumb on your tongue/rest your heel on my shoulder/your love melts like chocolate/on the tongue of God . . ." So yeah, a perfect soundtrack! I remember it really blew Zac away and he was a 100 per cent jazz purist at the time. But Jeff and this track made him turn – he said it reminded him of late Coltrane. Jeff and his band live were one of the clear moments in my life I will never forget – he was truly otherworldly.

2 Grace

MIKE KERR (ROYAL BLOOD)



THE FIRST TIME I HEARD "Grace", I must've been about 12. I heard the live version first from *Mystery White Boy*. I think it's actually one of my favourite songs ever written. The chord progressions and Jeff's back-up vocals over the lyrics "my fading voice sings of love" are truly magical. That set a fire in me. To this day I am still humbled by his incredible music. His ability to scream like a demon then croon like an angel whilst also playing some of the most expressive and emotive guitar playing really makes "Grace" for me. His lyrics are poetic and his string arrangements of the highest quality. It's Zeppelin, Nirvana, Billy Idol, all performed by God. Beat that.

3 Last Goodbye

MARK HOSKING (KARNIVOOL)



I REMEMBER STUDYING film at Melbourne University, and someone had made this documentary on local cemeteries and graffiti artwork, and it had as its soundtrack "Hallelujah", the Leonard Cohen song, but done by this amazing dude with such soul and mood. That night I did some hunting and found him: Jeff Buckley. The following day on the way to campus I stopped at a music store and picked up my first of what was to be 11 purchases of *Grace*, my most bought album of all time. I never made it to class. Every single track had my head spinning, but I just remember nights of setting my CD player on single-song repeat and sleeping with "Last Goodbye" playing on my headphones. That song seemed out of time, like he'd come back in a time machine from the future and laid down these melodies and harmonies and had an outsider's perspective on it all. It is such a beautifully light yet subtly dark song. From the opening slide guitar you are instantly lost in it, getting sucked into the wormhole vortex and loving every minute of it. Mind blowing.

4 Lilac Wine

MARLON WILLIAMS



I DISCOVERED 'GRACE' AS A 14-year-old and completely lost my shit. The voice and the mystery sucked me all the way in. I watched his *Live at Sin-é* and *Live In Chicago* concerts obsessively. I learned about Leonard Cohen and MC5 for the first time. But the crowning jewel of *Grace* for me was "Lilac Wine". It is a lesson in how to take a song completely out of space and time and make it a living part of yourself with disarming simplicity. I remember the sense of delight at finding it was written by someone completely unknown to me (James Shelton) in 1950 as part of some failed musical theatre review. For the first time I glimpsed a truth that became more and more important to me; that songs thrive best in anonymity, unwedded to the pen.

"It's Zeppelin, Nirvana, Billy Idol, all performed by God. Beat that."

—MIKE KERR ON 'GRACE'

5 So Real

ANDY BULL



THERE ARE TWO things about Jeff Buckley that nobody wants to talk about. Firstly: in the Nineties, *Grace* was very popular in the Christian-fellowship, Bible-study type scene. Secondly: many teenagers tried having sex with *Grace* as a soundtrack. So, keeping these facts in mind, there are two main reasons why "So Real" is a stand-out. Firstly, while it's true that Buckley seems to be kind of Jesus-y, nobody ever played "So Real" at Bible study, and they'd think you were a psycho if you tried. Secondly, regarding your early attempts at eroticism; playing *Grace* during sex may have seemed like a good-enough idea around "Last Goodbye" and "Lilac Wine", but when the chainsaw-distortion middle section of "So Real" hits, well, there in that precise moment you have the reason why nobody ever tried having sex to *Grace* twice.

6 Hallelujah

HUSKY GAWENDA (HUSKY)



BOB DYLAN SAID SOMETHING about 'uncovering' songs rather than covering them. I don't remember hearing "Hallelujah" for the first time – it was always there. My parents played Leonard Cohen non-stop. And it's a song that's been covered endlessly, or as Bob Dylan would say, covered so much it's been buried. I think it's unrecoverable. Unless you're Jeff Buckley. When I first heard Buckley's version I heard the song again for the first time. I was 16. To say the song is about the greatest paradox of all, the ecstatic agony of love, would be resorting to platitudes. But any attempt to describe what Buckley taps into with his version of "Hallelujah" would be hopelessly inadequate. The beauty, the longing, the aching vulnerability, the sex and desire and desperation and mystery of being alive and in love... well, there I go trying to describe it, and failing miserably.

7 Lover, You Should've Come Over

DAVID LE'AUPEPE (GANG OF YOUTHS)



IN THE 21ST CENTURY, *Grace* has been adopted as the default soundtrack to the life of the archetypi-



cal lovelorn and hapless millennial – the one "much too young/to keep good love from going wrong", set to bewail the stark complexities of love and humanness from atop his or her thrift shop barstool with a craft beer in hand. It's a painfully mawkish cliché now, but with all great time honoured tropes it's founded in some goddamned fundamental truth. If *Grace* was able to encapsulate that brief and exciting period of time where Jeff Buckley spoke straight to the hearts and loins of a multitude, then "Lover, You Should've Come Over" remains its definitive, zeitgeist moment. The burning and lusty quaintness of Buckley's blue-eyed-gospel-choirboy cadence with all its yearning and regret; the sex, the longing and imperfection of a mystery white boy ingrained in lines like "my body turns and yearns for a sleep that won't ever come" make for a compelling and honest confessional that two decades on still feels both harrowingly intimate and extraordinarily ambitious.

8 Corpus Christi Carol

ANNA CALVI



I WAS 16, ON A BUS HOME from school when my friend suggested I listened to "this cool singer Jeff Buckley", who had died a few years ago. Everything changed from this moment. I remember the same night, staying up until it was light outside listening to *Grace* over and over. His voice was so haunting and beautiful, the music was so advanced and complex yet so emotional rather than cerebral. It felt like he had found something in me that was mine, that I didn't even know had existed. I was taken by all the songs, but in particular the spine tingling adaptation of Benjamin Britten's "Corpus

Christi Carol". This song is an example of his extraordinary ability to take any song, from any genre and make it his own. He plucks his guitar like a harp and sings like an opera singer, creating a sound that's somehow ancient and current simultaneously. I remember the first time I listened to this song, waiting without breathing to hear his last high note rise up and disappear like smoke. The next week I bought a Telecaster guitar like his, and this is when my journey as a musician began in earnest.

9 Eternal Life

SUZE DEMARCHI (BABY ANIMALS)



I REMEMBER HEARING Jeff Buckley's voice on the radio somewhere in America and I just had to race to the nearest music store.

Everyone wanted to know about this guy, and he didn't give much away when he spoke. He gave everything away through his music and his performance. That is what I want from an artist; that is what I want to see when they perform. I want to know them through their songs and the way they move on stage, not through an interview. This album shows us all we need to know about him. His influences. His poetry. His nature, fears and optimism. All of his confusion. But most of all, his frailties. "Eternal Life" sounds almost like something Hendrix would be doing had he lived. He manages to go from deep heavy grooves to sweet and orchestral and back again all through this song without feeling disjointed. His melodies are king and everything else just wraps around his voice.

10 Dream Brother

RYAN LAMB (ALPINE)



'GRACE' IS LIKE A MAGNET for awkward, earnest kids, and God knows I was one of the most awkward, earnest kids around. I guess I

was 15 when I heard it and I played the CD to death. It literally wore out, probably because of our crappy, off-brand car stereo. My parents were hugely relieved, and our journeys went back to being soundtracked by UB40 and Abba's *Gold*. "Dream Brother" is the perfect closer for *Grace* – the brooding atmospherics, the hypnotic rockout, and that sincere, wounded voice rising above the chaos and noise, pleading with his friend to not abandon his son the way his own father did. And then, calm.





CLOSE-UP

The Swede Life

ALICIA VIKANDER MIGHT BE THE HARDEST working new actress in Hollywood, appearing in no less than six movies this year. Next up is Guy Ritchie's *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, in which she plays the linchpin of a spy plot in the swinging Sixties, a part the 26-year-old hopes adds to the recent crop of meatier roles for women. "Movies with strong women leads like *The Hunger Games* have proven over and over again that female leads in big movies attract big, big audiences," she offers from the *U.N.C.L.E.* set in Rome.

The daughter of a stage actress, the petite 5'5" Vikander fell in love with performing herself, training in ballet and touring worldwide. After an injury in her teens cut her career short she turned to acting, appearing on TV in her native Sweden.

FULL SCHEDULE
Vikander has six films coming out this year. She was "terrified and excited" by *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*

As for whether acting is easier than ballet, she says: "No, it's just different. The hard work is still there; the actions may be different but the actual body and mind work is just as hard."

It turns out acting can be equally as punishing as ballet. "I have some bruises and things," she says of the *U.N.C.L.E.* shoot. "What I love the most are the car stunts."

Currently dating *The Light Between Oceans* co-star Michael Fassbender, Vikander's last major role, in *Ex Machina*, saw her play an artificially intelligent robot, earning praise from movie goers and critics alike.

"I loved the script because the action is actually not driven by physicality but because of the dialogue," she says. "In [*U.N.C.L.E.*], I'd never done an action packed comedy so I was both terrified and extremely excited." **DREW TURNER**

THE ENDLESS FALL OF

SUUGE

He sold America on a West Coast gangster fantasy – and embodied it. Then the bills came due

BY MATT DIEHL

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION
BY SEAN MCCABE

KNIGHT





ON MARCH 20TH, INSIDE THE HIGH-SECURITY wing of Los Angeles' Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center, the man once called "the most feared man in hip-hop" is looking more like the 50-year-old with chronic health issues that he is. Suge Knight sits in shackles, wearing an orange prison jumpsuit and chunky glasses, his beard flecked with grey, listening impassively. It's the end of the day's proceedings, and Judge Ronald S. Coen is announcing the

bail for Knight, who is facing charges of murder, attempted murder and hit-and-run: "In this court's opinion, \$25 million is reasonable, and it is so set." A gasp erupts from Knight's row of supporters – some of whom sport red clothing or accessories, a colour associated with the Bloods and Piru street gangs. The most shocked are Knight's family, who have attended nearly all of his court dates: his parents, along with his fiancée, Toi-lin Kelly, and sister Karen Anderson. "He's never had a bail like that before!" Anderson exclaims.

As attendees exit and Knight is escorted out by the bailiffs, Knight's attorney Matthew Fletcher pleads with Coen to reconsider. Fletcher points out that Knight has been held in solitary confinement for nearly three months, with next to no contact with family or friends. ("They wouldn't allow this at Guantánamo Bay," Fletcher says.) The lawyer goes on to complain about Knight's treatment in jail for his numerous medical ailments, which include diabetes, blood clots and impaired vision.

The judge is unswayed, especially by Fletcher's pleas about Knight's poor health. "He was offered food and refused it," says Coen. At that moment, as if on cue, Knight re-enters the courtroom, and suddenly collapses, his 135-kilogram-plus frame tumbling forward onto the padded chair he was just sitting in minutes earlier. Outside, Knight's supporters have started a protest. "This is a public lynching!" shouts a woman in a red dress and blonde Afro. "Black lives matter!" The painful irony is that Knight is being prosecuted for murdering a black man – a man he once called his friend – and seriously injuring another.

This could finally be the end of the road for the record-label head who, a generation ago, helped bring the West Coast gangsta rap of Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg and Tupac Shakur to the mainstream, pushing aside the pop rap of artists such as MC Hammer and Tone-Loc and putting low-riders and gang signs into heavy rotation on MTV. In the process, Knight established himself as a legendary music-biz tough guy.

MATT DIEHL profiled Beck after the release of "Morning Phase" last year.

His exploits – some mythic, some real – during the heyday of Death Row Records have become part of hip-hop lore: In the early Nineties, he allegedly shook down Vanilla Ice into handing over publishing profits, walking the rapper out to a hotel-room balcony to show him how far his fall would be. ("I needed to wear a diaper that day," Ice said later.) In his memoir, former N.W.A manager Jerry Heller alleged that Knight and his cohorts, bearing baseball bats, intimidated Eazy-E into releasing Dre from his Ruthless Records contract. (The claims have never been substantiated.) Knight was sitting next to Tupac when he was gunned down in 1996 in Las Vegas; his participation in a fight on the night of the shooting would land him in prison for five years on a probation violation.

As Knight's fortunes have crumbled, he's gotten closer to the streets, according to prosecutors. In a motion arguing for the high bail (which would later be reduced to \$10 million), the L.A. District Attorney's office alleged a recent scheme by Knight to "tax" out-of-town rappers for as much as \$30,000 just to work in Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Last year, Knight called out Rick Ross in a video interview: "You know you owe that bread, titty man," Knight said. "I'm gonna beat the dog shit out of you." His targets aren't limited to big fish – in 2014 he was caught on surveil-

lance punching a worker at an L.A. medical-marijuana dispensary after being refused service for lacking documentation.

Knight hasn't been charged for any of the above episodes; his current lawyer Thomas Mesereau says, "He never threatened Vanilla Ice", and that all the claims of extortion are based on "a lot of gossip and innuendo". But former associates struggle to understand why such an undeniably talented businessman can't escape this kind of small-time drama and thugery. "I watched Suge decline the last 10 years," says Cash Jones, a.k.a. Wack 100, a former Death Row "foot soldier" who now manages Ray J and the Game. Knight already has two prior violent felonies on his record: If any of his current charges stick, under California's Three Strikes law, he could be going to jail for the rest of his life.

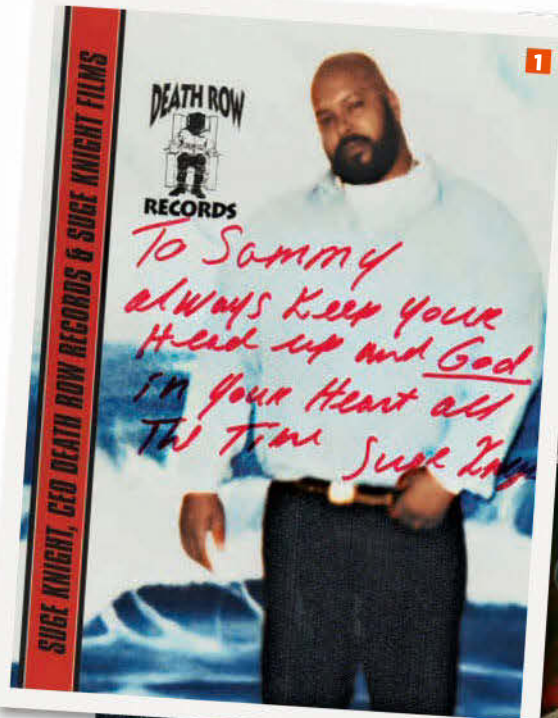
"Suge lost focus of the business, and who he is," says Jones. "He could've been a lot of things, but he chose not to."

KNIGHT'S MOST RECENT TROUBLES apparently began like many Suge Knight stories: with him thinking that somebody owed him money. The upcoming N.W.A biopic, *Straight Outta Compton* – co-produced by Dre and Ice Cube, and due out in September – was getting attention after a teaser leaked in December. "People working on the set were calling and telling Suge, 'Hey, man, this movie is really [becoming] a Death Row movie', with a Suge look-alike in the movie beating up people in the studio and all that," says Reggie Wright, a childhood friend of Knight's who worked at Death Row from 1994 to 2002. "Suge felt like they were using his likeness in this movie without consulting him."

On the afternoon of January 29th, Knight drove up to the production's base camp in his red Ford Raptor pickup, breezing past the film's security. Dre's bodyguards would not move him while Knight was on the premises, leaving producers in a panic. Cle "Bone" Sloan – a "nonactive" gang member who was working as a technical adviser to the movie – stepped in, confronting Knight. Sloan said later that he had heard there was a "problem" between "[Knight] and Dre or somebody". The confrontation turned into a shouting match. Sloan said he told Knight, "Why don't you leave so we can move forward? You got the white folks scared!" Eventually, Knight left the set.

Shortly after clearing out, Knight received a call from a respected South Central entrepreneur named Terry Carter who was at the shoot that day and was perhaps hoping to mediate the dispute. Carter, 55, was a self-made man who, after losing his mother and brother in the space of a year when he was 18, had built businesses in music, cars and real estate – most notably co-founding Heavyweight Records with

KNIGHT
WOULDN'T LEAVE THE
N.W.A MOVIE'S SET.
SLOAN TOLD HIM,
"YOU GOT THE WHITE
FOLKS SCARED!"



Let Me Ride

(1) Knight ran Death Row out of a medium-security prison in Northern California from 1996 to 2001. (2) In court with his lawyer Thomas Mesereau on May 29, 2015. (3) On January 29 Knight ran over Cle "Bone" Sloan, crushing his ankles, and (4) local businessman Terry Carter, who died from his injuries.



Ice Cube in 1998. "Ice Cube and Dre would come by the house like it was nothing," says Carter's daughter Nekaya about her childhood. Carter was a family man, with three children; he had also taken in his sister-in-law's five kids when she couldn't care for them. People who knew Carter call him a "peacemaker".

There are different accounts of Knight's relationship with Carter. His daughters say that he and Knight had done little more than "cross paths", but Knight's friend and bail bonds agent Jane Un says that Carter and Knight were "friends" and had even "explored going into business together". Carter was now requesting Knight's presence at a Compton burger joint, Tam's, a few kilometres from the movie's base camp.

Minutes later, Knight pulled up outside the Tam's parking lot, where Carter and at least one other man had already gathered. According to Sloan's interview with police, Knight started bad-mouthing Sloan – just as, unbeknownst to Knight, he pulled up. "He was talking shit," Sloan recounted, "and I just popped out like a jack-in-the-box." Sloan came at Knight saying, "Let's do it!" and began throwing punches at Knight through the Raptor's window.

Knight's vehicle lurched into reverse, knocking down Sloan. Then he put it into

drive, running over Sloan and crushing his ankles. Knight's pickup kept surging forward, plowing into a fleeing Carter, killing him. (The entire gruesome, abrupt series of events was captured on a grainy, soundless surveillance video, which was obtained by TMZ.com.)

"Every day, I try to forget it," Sloan said later. "I screwed up, and Terry's dead." Knight turned himself in to police about 12 hours later, around three in the morning. Knight's initial counsel in the case, James Blatt, told the *Los Angeles Times* that Knight was "heartbroken" over Carter's death. A subsequent lawyer, Fletcher, has suggested that Carter helped lure Knight into a deathtrap. Carter's friends and family are still deep in mourning. "It was a tragedy," says Lydia Harris, an early Death Row partner. Nearly 2,000 people attended Carter's funeral.

Knight's strategy will almost certainly be self-defense. But even if he wins, he is facing another case, which has received less media attention, but may prove harder to beat. Last September, Knight and comedian Katt Williams were leaving a Beverly Hills studio when they encountered celebrity photographer Leslie Redden. Believing Redden had photographed Knight's son without permission, Knight is alleged to have told her he had a "bitch" who was going to beat her "motherfucking ass", and to have shown Redden his waistband. Redden fled, but was stopped by Williams and an unknown woman, who allegedly knocked the photographer to the ground and took her camera. In addition to criminal charges against Knight and

Williams (who have both pleaded not guilty), Redden has also filed a civil suit against Knight, alleging severe injuries to her back, head and neck.

"It don't matter if it's \$100 or \$100,000," says Cash Jones, "when you take somebody's property and harm them in the process, it's robbery" – a felony charge that could also put Knight away for years. "Suge was already out on bail for that case, and now he has this hit-and-run situation – and there's video of it that's not in his favour. He's over with."

"HE WAS ALWAYS THE SAME guy," says Wright, "boisterous, a bully." Marion Hugh Knight Jr. grew up on the east side of Compton, in what was, by all accounts, a strong, loving family. "The irony is that you would think this guy comes from a broken home," says former Death Row publicist Jonathan Wolfson, "but his parents have been married to this day, and they are the *nicest*."

"Suge's daddy was lovely!" says Knight's ex-girlfriend, the R&B singer Michel'le, talking about Marion Knight Sr. and mother Maxine. "Oh, he's just a dream. His mother is nice too, but she has a mouth on her like Suge: She'd curse you out one minute and then go, 'Well, you know, baby, it's OK' the next. Suge is a mama's boy, definitely." Many who have dealt with Knight cite his keen natural intelligence. "Suge had huge potential," says Wolfson. "He could've done anything – he was a force."

A charismatic, gifted athlete, Knight wanted more than his parents' two-bedroom home. "As soon as I was old enough," he told *The Guardian* in 2001, "I told myself that I'd never live or end up dying in a place like that. I made up my mind that I wanted everything, and nothing would stop me." Knight started playing on the Lynwood High football team; he was fast as well as strong. "I remember our coach chastising me because Suge beat me in a race, and I was a running back, and he was a lineman," says Wright. Knight said that he would shake down wealthy white kids outside their Hollywood high schools, but he was more of an alpha-male football player than a hoodlum as a teenager. "He had twin cousins, Ronald and Donald," says Wright, "and they pretty much ran Lynwood High School." His neighbourhood was a Piru Bloods zone – Knight has said he sometimes saw bodies in the alleys on the way to school – but "gangbangers didn't mess with the athletes," says Wright.

Knight had two impressive seasons at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, and a short-lived NFL career, going undrafted but making it onto the Los Angeles Rams

as a replacement player for two games during the strike season of 1987. That same year, he shot a man in Las Vegas while allegedly trying to steal his car, and was arrested for attempted murder. Knight pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor and was put on probation, but his pro football career was over.

Interestingly, Wright attributes some of Knight's unpredictability and rage to diabetes, which has shadowed him throughout his life. "A lot of people don't know Suge has diabetes real bad," Wright says. "He doesn't have the correct medication to treat it, or go to the doctor to get it controlled correctly. So a lot of the times when he gets angry, it's because his sugar is up."

With the door to the NFL closed, Knight used his size to get into the music business, working as a bodyguard for Bobby Brown. Knight began moving in the same circles as rapper the D.O.C., as well as Dre, Eazy-E, Cube – and a young MC named Mario Johnson, who complained that he'd written much of Vanilla Ice's *To the Extreme*. Knight saw his opportunity, which supposedly led to the notorious hotel-room confrontation with the white Florida rapper. Ice settled with Knight for an unspecified amount. It was his first big payday.

The next breakthrough came when D.O.C., Dre and Knight hatched a plan to get the rappers out of their contracts with Heller's Ruthless Records. Death Row was founded in 1991, and the next few years were gilded with hits: Dre's *The Chronic* went triple-platinum, followed by Snoop Dogg's quadruple-platinum *Doggystyle*. In the space of a few years, Knight had inserted himself into the heart of West Coast hip-hop and taken over.

Michel'le, who was signed to Ruthless and then Death Row, says that things began to sour between Knight and Dre when Tupac came into the picture in 1995. Knight felt that Dre didn't have Tupac's gung-ho work ethic; Shakur would become both Death Row's commercial focal point and Knight's close friend in a way Dre never was. At the same time, Knight began to feel disrespected by the superstar producer. "Dre did not want to listen to Suge, and that bothered him," Michel'le says. "Suge was like, 'You were getting two cents a record [with Eazy-E and Heller], but I helped you make real money.'"

But Wright says the break came when Knight began a relationship with Michel'le – Dre's former fiancée and mother to his son Marcel – in the mid-Nineties. "Dre was over Michel'le – he had another woman, but that's still his baby mama," Wright says. "I think at first, Michel'le was Suge's spy, telling him what was going on between Jimmy [Iovine] and Dre, but he grew to love her." Knight and Michel'le would have a daughter, Bailei, in 2002.



The Cost to Be the Boss

(1) With Tupac Shakur at the Tyson vs. Bruno fight at the MGM Grand. (2) Knight at Lynwood High School, 1982. (3) In his Track Recording studio, 2002.



In 1996, Dre split with Knight, forming his own label, Aftermath – like Death Row, under the umbrella of Iovine's Interscope Records. Knight was relentless in trying to get back master recordings that he believed belonged to Death Row. According to Randall Sullivan's *Labyrinth*, Knight talked his way onto Dre's property claiming to be Iovine: "When he opened the door, Dre said, 'In comes Suge with eight or nine niggas,'" demanding the tapes.

Jones points to that time as a crossroads for both Dre and Knight. "You know what Dre did? He kept chasing success," says Jones. "The fact remains that right now, today, Suge sits in prison facing murder charges, and Dre is a billionaire."

This fact is not lost on Knight, who still feels entitled to hundreds of millions of dollars from Dre. According to a *New York Times* article, "Knight told investigators he expected a 10 per cent share of the proceeds from last year's \$3 billion sale by [Dre] of Beats to Apple."

BOTH FRIENDS AND FOES agree that Knight never quite recovered from his five-year prison bid, which started in 1996. He tried to keep his hands on the reins of Death Row – which was still a commercial force – from Mule Creek, a medium-security prison in a small Northern California town, where he'd been placed in the general population. Wright, who was now

managing Death Row's day-to-day operations, would visit Mule Creek from Thursday to Sunday each week to keep Knight abreast of label activities, while Death Row's new publicist, Wolfson – a New Yorker who had recently started his own PR company – found himself adapting to the unique work conditions. "I was this Jewish kid from Rockland County – I'd never even been to a jail before," recalls Wolfson, who would work with Knight for six years. "I was instructed to bring \$30 in single dollar bills to use in vending machines. I'd put this mountain of food on the table for him to eat. They had this prisoner walking around with a Polaroid camera. For \$2 he would take a picture with you and your imprisoned loved one in front of this backdrop with clouds and a skyline. That's actually

where we did a few of our press shots." "When I went up to the penitentiary to see Suge for the first time, it was a real trippy experience," notes Kxng Crooked, a rapper who was signed to Death Row under the name Crooked I from 1999 to 2004. "I went there to talk about my record deal, and we were negotiating on napkins! He'd ask me what I wanted, and I'd write it on the napkin and slide it over: 'Ah, that's doable...' It was crazy. Suge was like, 'I can get you Grammys, I can put your name up on billboards....I can do all this.'"

When Knight got out of prison in 2001, "He was different," Wright says. "And he was more notorious than ever." Knight quickly returned to the high-roller lifestyle he'd enjoyed in the Nineties. "There was a lot of partying – in New York, Houston, Chicago, Malibu, staying at the Four Seasons in Hawaii," says Crooked. "We took Suge's yacht out a couple of times and got DJs and caterers on there, called up some

well-known strippers. We spent a lot of time just enjoying life.”

There were signs that the party was going to end. Death Row had split with distributor Interscope in 1998, which meant less of a financial safety net. But in Knight’s absence, the label had some success with posthumous Tupac releases and a greatest-hits compilation, and soon assembled a promising new roster featuring rappers such as Crooked and Kurupt of Tha Dogg Pound – and briefly, before her death in a 2002 car crash, TLC’s Lisa “Left-Eye” Lopes. “I loved Left-Eye – she brought so much peace to the label, bro,” says Crooked. “She would make sure the guys were eating well, and make you herbal tea to clear up your cold. She was just a warm spirit, bringing balance inside that crazy world.”

According to multiple sources, Left-Eye was also getting warm with Knight. The two started an affair, which created its own drama. When she discovered a love nest in the Death Row offices where he’d seduce other women, Wright says, Lopes threw bleach all over the furniture – causing thousands of dollars worth of damage. (Knight has sired at least seven children with various women. Michelle recalls discovering 17 lingerie-stuffed Victoria’s Secret bags during a work trip to the Bahamas with Knight before they were an item – each bag apparently intended for a different woman Knight was involved with.)

Knight’s dreams of restoring Death Row to its former glory soon fizzled. Not long after he got out, “He said, ‘Let’s go to New York – we’ve got to let the world know that we’re back!’” says Crooked. “So we hit the media trail very hard – went to all the main stations, all the magazines, everything. It just felt like, ‘OK, it’s about to pop off.’”

It never did. “Crooked was one of the hardest rappers on the West Coast back then – lyrically, he could stand with anybody,” says Jones. “But he had no distribution – and, ultimately, no album on Death Row.” Nearly all of the label’s projects from that era suffered similar fates.

“A lot of people didn’t want to see Suge succeed,” Crooked says. “People were intimidated by him. The ball would start moving, and then it would just stop dead.”

“No one wanted to do business with him,” says Jones. “He had no artists, radio showed him no favours, his office building was in foreclosure, and there were all kinds of tax liens and lawsuits. He had to revert back to what he knew – which was the block.”

“We were getting into brawls, and our CEO was throwing punches too,” Crooked says. Comic relief at the Death Row headquarters on Wilshire Boulevard was provided by a pet parrot squawking curse words. Upon entering the office foyer, guests were greeted by a painting depicting Dre being sodomised by a muscular blond man, as Diddy, sporting a ballet

tutu, and a piglike Notorious B.I.G. look on. Gangbangers roamed the halls, sometimes walking pit bulls on chains. “People on the street looked at Death Row as a gang more than a record label,” adds Crooked. “I bought myself a vest, and an arsenal – a .357 Magnum and a P89 Ruger. That’s how real it was. I don’t think it will ever be like that again, and I don’t want it to be.”

At the 2004 Vibe Awards ceremony in Santa Monica, Knight allegedly paid an associate to punch Dre as he prepared to accept a lifetime achievement award – after which Dre’s attacker was stabbed, apparently in retaliation, by G-Unit rapper Young Buck. (Buck was sentenced to three years’ probation; his victim suffered a collapsed lung; Knight was investigated but never charged.) “We were at the Vibe Awards for one reason and one reason

“WHEN SUGE GOT OUT OF PRISON IN 2001, HE WAS DIFFERENT. AND MORE NOTORIOUS THAN EVER.”

only: for a problem,” admits Jones, who attended the event alongside Knight.

The authorities, meanwhile, were keeping an eye on Knight and Death Row. “There was pressure from the police,” Crooked remembers. “If you were on Death Row, your car and house were definitely marked. A cop would just knock on your door and say, ‘We’re just checking on you. We know you Death Row rappers, we know how you all like to live.’” One day in 2002, the L.A. County Sheriff’s Department stormed the label’s office in a morning raid involving a gang-related homicide. “They made everyone get on the ground,” Crooked says. “Then they cut up the ceiling and took all the computers.” Crooked had enough: “I’m an artist. I got tired of living this lifestyle and not putting out music.” (Crooked is currently signed to Eminem’s Shady Records as a member of rap supergroup Slaughterhouse, and also performs as a solo artist.)

The final blow for Death Row came in 2005, when Lydia Harris was awarded a staggering \$107 million damages judgment. Death Row had been started with money from Harris’ then-husband, im-

prisoned drug dealer Michael “Harry O” Harris. But her reasons for suing Knight were personal as well as financial. “Years had gone by, and then Suge got on national TV, saying that I slept with so many guys,” says Harris, who was also awarded damages for defamation of character as part of the larger lawsuit.

The following year, Death Row declared bankruptcy, and the label’s assets were eventually liquidated and sold. “They auctioned off everything,” Crooked claims. “They even sold Suge’s boxer briefs that they found in the penthouse suite on top of the Death Row building! Here was one of the only African-American men to own a major building on Wilshire Boulevard, and they sold the man’s *fucking drawers*. That either inspires you to get up and create something even bigger – or you crumble up inside and become bitter.”

Knight’s finances have never fully recuperated. He was recently in negotiations to sell his life rights for film, TV and technology projects to a company called Everlert. Its president, Mark Blankenship – a Yale-educated former attorney and one-time Republican congressional candidate who sports a long braid down his back – says that, thanks to Knight’s latest ordeal, those life rights are becoming “more and more valuable every day”. But in the meantime, Blankenship says that Everlert had to help pay the school tuition for Knight’s young son Legend.

ACCORDING TO WRIGHT, THE BANKRUPTCY “broke the man down”. Knight was busted for marijuana possession in 2005 (the charge was later dropped), and in 2008 he was arrested for beating his then-girlfriend Melissa Isaac while in possession of Ecstasy and hydrocodone. (Knight pleaded guilty to misdemeanor battery, was charged a \$340 fine and ordered to undergo counselling.) “Suge didn’t do drugs back in the old days – he didn’t smoke marijuana, or anything,” Michelle claims. “All he’d do was have a glass of champagne to toast with at celebrations. That was it.”

In 2005, at a party thrown by Kanye West at Miami Beach’s Shore Club before the MTV Video Music Awards, Knight was shot in the leg. The shooter – according to federal documents obtained by the Smoking Gun – was allegedly paid \$10,000 to do so by Jimmy “Henchman” Rosemond, a now-imprisoned cocaine trafficker and former manager of rapper the Game. “I talked to Suge from the hospital, and he told me he accidentally shot himself, which never made sense to me,” says Lloyd “TaTa” Lake, a former friend and business associate. “I discovered that was a lie when a friend of mine told me about a phone conversation he’d hooked up between Suge and Jimmy Henchman. He quoted Jimmy as telling Suge, ‘Keep my motherfucking name out [Cont. on 104]



THE KING OF COMEDY

Judd Apatow on his childhood, conquering Hollywood and why he still feels like an outsider

By Jonah Weiner

JUDD APATOW SETTLES INTO THE HOME OFFICE AT his Brentwood mansion one recent evening. He's wearing socks, jeans and a polo shirt. Messes of paper and books cover every surface – scripts he needs to read, novels and biographies he wants to. The mess is a fitting visual corollary to his neuroses, which, after all these years, still gnaw at him. “I have a very hard time filing things away,” he says. “Someone will come in and straighten up, but then it's back to looking like this in three days.”

Over the past decade, Apatow has become the most prominent comedy-maker of our time. His name evokes not only a particular comedic tone (heartfelt raunch) but also particular stars (Seth Rogen, Jonah Hill, Melissa McCarthy, all of whom he helped give big breaks), particular techniques (endless on-set improv, which he helped pioneer) and particular gags (Steve Carell getting his chest waxed in *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*). Besides the just-released *Trainwreck*, with Amy Schumer, Apatow, 47, has directed four movies – *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Knocked Up*, *Funny People*, *This Is 40* – and as a producer he has shepherded *Anchorman*, *Superbad*, *Pineapple Express* and *Bridesmaids*, among other smashes, to theatres.

To help inspire himself at the start of shooting *Trainwreck*, he returned to doing stand-up for the first time in decades. Stand-up was his first



love: As a teen, he interviewed comics like Jerry Seinfeld and Garry Shandling for his high school radio station. (These are included, alongside newer conversations, in *Sick in the Head*, his recently published collection of comedian interviews.) In his twenties, he opened for his buddy Jim Carrey and wrote jokes for Roseanne Barr. He was a driving force behind cult gems like *The Ben Stiller Show* and *Freaks and Geeks* – shows that highlighted, respectively, his twin interests in absurdity and naturalism. More recently, Apatow helped Lena Dunham develop *Girls*.

Present these bullet points of his résumé to Apatow, though, and he demurs. “It’s about which collaborators you luck into working with,” he says. “And I’ve been blessed to meet some of the most talented people around.”

Did your parents’ divorce drive you into comedy?

When I was a kid, I wanted to move to California – I wanted to get out [of Long Island]. Whatever was difficult in my childhood, it was my motivation to get a job and work hard. I never hear my kids say, “I gotta get the fuck out of Brentwood!” or “The parking at Brentwood Country Mart is awful!” So I don’t know if making their lives stable is helping them or de-motivating them.

What’s it like where you’re from on Long Island?

I started in Woodbury, and then my parents divorced and we moved to Syosset, next door. They separated when I was in sixth grade, got back together, then separated again between eighth and ninth grade, I think. Everyone in my neighbourhood, they’d start out living in a big house and then their parents would divorce and they would move to a condo a mile away. I found a poem recently that I wrote when I was 15, maybe 13, called “Divorce”. I wrote it when I was a dishwasher at a comedy club on the weekends. It’s so funny but it’s so sad. It predicts my entire life.

[Apatow walks to a backpack and retrieves the poem. It consists of couplets like “For me there was separation with lots of tears/Going out with my friends, marijuana and beers”; then, a few lines later, “I cover my pain with silly jokes/No more drugs or beer, just Cokes.” By the end, he’s found a degree of solace in an imagined showbiz future: “Maybe one day I’ll be a big star, driving around in a big car, and I won’t mind that my parents split/Because it helped me write my comedy shit.”]

It’s your career blueprint.

Isn’t that crazy? I was trying to figure out how to express all this. The next page is “Funny Stuff About Divorce”. I tried to

list what’s funny about it, but a lot of these things are really dark. It says, “Charging stuff”, because my mother would charge stuff on my dad’s credit card without permission. This is me trying to survive.

It’s remarkable that you were already treating your misery as potential material.

I always knew that Richard Pryor’s family ran a brothel – was his mother a prostitute? His grandmother was the pimp. I don’t remember the details, but I remember thinking, “I wish I had something like that.”

Your mum moved out and you stayed with your dad. Did you take his side?

They separated and my mum moved to Southampton. I said, “I’m not leaving.” I was close with my best friends Ronnie and Kevin, and I was not gonna change schools. Later, I talked to my mum right before she died, and she said she thought she would only be gone for a couple of weeks: “I thought we would get right back together.”

But your dad had a girlfriend, and she moved in.

My mum made me feel like just living with my dad was a betrayal.... There was a lot of energy from her, like, “How can you talk to him?” And she never took it back. In modern times, people say terrible things and then that night they say, “I’m sorry, I got upset, this is a really hard situation.” My mum never said that, my whole childhood, after going on a run of hurt. That puts you on guard – emotionally, it shuts you down.

Your brother came from the same situation and is now an Orthodox Jew in Israel.

Me, him and my sister, we were all split up between my parents – we weren’t around each other enough to be a normal, healthy unit. I get along really well with my sister today. But as kids we had no tools to support each other. We were all just winging it. My brother was looking for something he could use to make sense of everything. And that became Judaism.

And for you it was comedy.

You get lucky that the thing you use as your defence mechanism actually turns out to be a way you can make a living. I could have been into playing the spoons! I lucked out that the thing I wanted to do turned out to be a business that gets bigger every year. No one was interested in it when I was a kid. Back then, I’m just alone in a library, looking up articles about Lenny Bruce’s

death, not mentioning it to anybody. I had to wait till I was 17 and I moved to L.A. to find like-minded people.

Please tell me about the time Jim Henson basically called you unlikable.

Henson was trying to put together a show where comedians travelled across the country with video cameras. Adam Sandler and I made an audition, with David Spade, I think. We all got turned down. But when I didn’t get the job, the feedback was “Jim Henson would like to pay you a thousand dollars for all of your ideas for the show, but he thought you lacked warmth”. It only would have been worse if Mr. Rogers said it.

It was probably incredibly accurate on some level – not about warmth, but my confidence was so low I was tight – and probably still is, honestly, in life and art. I’ve been talking about that onstage [during stand-up sets] because it was my worst fear.

One of your longest friendships has been with Sandler. Why is a guy as talented as him making junk like “Grown Ups”, much less “Grown Ups 3”?

I don’t think you need to call it junk, because that’s hurtful. It’s a naked thing to try to make people happy and try to express yourself that way. And the culture is brutal on anything they don’t like instantly, and they’re especially tough on people who have had success.... Sandler said something interesting after we did *Funny People*. He said a lot of people think movies like that one, or *Punch-Drunk Love*, should be held up higher than the hard-funny movies, but we know how it’s as difficult, or maybe way more difficult, to make *You Don’t Mess With the Zohan*. When comedy is done well, it seems effortless.

“Funny People” and “This Is 40” didn’t do as well at the box office as your first two movies. Maybe part of the reason is they aren’t about outsiders or losers, like “The 40-Year-Old Virgin” and “Knocked Up” were.

Now that some of the movies have been out for a while, I have people talking about moments in *This Is 40* that they relate to – what it’s about connects with people as they reach certain moments in their lives.... I write movies about bromances and being immature, and at some point I have to write movies about fatherhood and being sick and mortality. Everyone is figuring out how to be creative in the next phase of their life.

“
My mum made me feel like just living with my dad was a betrayal. She never took it back.
”

You've said you came at comedy as an outsider – someone whose comedic fuel was being the small kid picked last. Do success and power make it harder to be funny?

The feeling of being the little kid never goes away. The other day, I was in a restaurant and the head of Sony was there with someone else from Sony. I walked over to the table and I didn't have any clue what to say, so I just said [*his voice gets disconcertingly, awkwardly loud*], "Hey, how's it going?" They're like, "...Hi." And I went, "What do you guys eat here?" One of them said, "The fish." I thought, "I'm such an idiot."

Early in your career, you kept making shows that got cancelled. Were those early

played ball with executives and took their notes more graciously, right?

None of my yelling had seemed to have done anything positive. So I realised I should listen and see what their concerns are. Some I agreed with, some I didn't, but there was a solution to all of them. I tried to spin everything they were concerned about into something positive. They said, "Steve Carell looks like a serial killer – he looks like Jeffrey Dahmer." Then we said, "Maybe we should talk about that in the movie," and that became a part of the story.

What made you get back to stand-up?

I interviewed Pearl Jam about their last record, and I thought, "When you write a

There's a perception that you're using your stature to help break down barriers.

There haven't been anywhere near enough movies made by women, written by women, starring women – it's all fresh terrain, and that's exciting. There's not a big run of Gilda Radner movies we were left with. A lot of these people didn't get those opportunities, and they should have. But I look at it more as a fan – I want to see Amy Schumer in a movie.

There is something lowercase-c conservative about the value your movies place on building or protecting the family unit.

I like the family unit. I could make a movie that ends with everyone being single and deciding they don't like each other, but that's not such a bold move to make. There's only so many ways to end these movies.

One common rap against you is that you don't know when to end them.

I'm rarely trying to compress time. I'm trying to slow life down so it never ends, and that may be why all the movies are 15 minutes longer than some people would want them to be. But then, I always say, "You'll go home and watch 11 episodes of *Breaking Bad* in a row, so fuck you, I want my 15 minutes!"

How long did you hold out before searching for your own name in the hacked Sony e-mail database?

I didn't. I didn't do it. My assistant took a peek, and after 20 seconds I said, "Let's not do this." But the stuff that came out early was really funny because it was me asking for things and Sony saying no. Me wanting to make *Pineapple Express 2* at a certain budget and them forwarding the e-mails to each other saying no.

Sandler's character in "Funny People," George Simmons, is diagnosed with a rare blood disease. Is one of the subtexts that being a comedian – having that personality and wiring – is almost a worse fate than having that kind of condition?

My mum died in 2008, and I was writing *Funny People* while she was sick. I had one idea about someone who got sick and learned nothing from it, then I had an idea about how it felt to be a young comedian mentored by older comedians. Then I realised it can be the same movie. But it was written in deep sorrow. I noticed that whenever she thought she was gonna die, she seemed happier, and let go of her neuroses.

Another thing about Simmons is that he's in this huge mansion, sort of like the one we're in now, and he's miserable. You've said that as an entertainer, all the success in the world won't heal you.

It doesn't do anything. There is a great distraction in thinking, "When I get to the top of that hill, it's all gonna be awesome." And then when you get to the top of the hill, you're like, "Oh, I guess now I have to really deal with my problems, because that didn't work at all."



FUNNY PEOPLE

Apatow with Schumer and Bill Hader on the set of *Trainwreck*. Schumer helped Apatow get back into stand-up.

failures – programs like "The Ben Stiller Show" and "Freaks and Geeks" – the audience's fault, the networks' fault or the shows' fault?

You never find out. You can say, "*Freaks and Geeks* was on only 12 times over 26 weeks, so how was it gonna find its audience?" Or you could say, "It didn't set the world on fire right away – we weren't *Empire!*" But we were on Saturday night, up against *Cops*, they moved us to Tuesday, and we felt there wasn't a lot of marketing energy behind it. But it feels like everyone has seen it now.

It was ahead of its time in a few ways.

Yeah. Today, it would be a hit! At that time you couldn't survive with 7 million viewers. I was like, "Maybe I'm fringier than I thought. Maybe this is the equivalent of a Replacements record – I like the Replacements more than almost everything in the Top 40."

Directing "The 40-Year-Old Virgin," you finally had a hit. In part it's because you

song that connects with people, the rest of your life you just sing it and have this communion with the audience, and you get pure joy." You get none of that as a filmmaker. That was in my head: Where's my concert where I can play the greatest hits?

So I said to Amy Schumer, "Write up some premises for jokes for me, and I'll write the jokes." She would send me areas, like what if instead of having girls I had boys. Then I started remembering some stories I told on talk shows, and I put a set together. After about six months of sets, I figured out my older-comic voice, and I think I did a better job on the movie.

You've lately come to be seen as a champion of funny women onscreen, whether it's producing "Bridesmaids" and "Girls" or working with Schumer on "Trainwreck." Was this a conscious move?

There was no political agenda for me. I'm not bumping into five male Lena Dunhams I'm turning down. I'm not meeting tons of Amy Schumers I'm turning down.

**HOW WE
LEARNED TO QUIT
WORRYING AND LOVE
KIM KARDASHIAN**

**BY
VANESSA GRIGORIADIS**

AMERICAN WOMAN

ON A CHILLY MORNING DURING LOS ANGELES' "MAY grey", as mist rolls off the sea's marine layer to cool down the city, Kim Kardashian wakes up at 6 a.m. and an hour later heads to her "glam room". That's Kardashian-speak for her capacious dressing room, where even at this early hour, a professional makeup artist and hairstylist have already arrived, awaiting her with hundreds of little brushes, blushes and combs. She relaxes into her chair as layer upon layer is applied – she loves the feeling of getting makeup done, the way you can be at one with your eyeliner – while also glancing at a baby monitor in case North, her two-year-old daughter with husband Kanye West, wakes up. West has his own monitor too, and keeps it close in case North stirs while Kardashian's indisposed. By 9:00, Kardashian

PHOTOGRAPH BY TERRY RICHARDSON



is on her way to a meeting in Santa Monica. She hates being late.

Does this sound pretty dull? Yes, but it's the stuff that Kardashian has spun into gold, transforming herself from a beautiful but average L.A. girl into one of the world's top pop icons and megabrand. She is everywhere in the media, from E!'s *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, her 10-season-long TV show that's aired in 160 countries and spawned numerous spinoffs, to her mobile game, which has been downloaded 33 million times, to high-fashion magazines, which have, first grudgingly and then enthusiastically, accepted that the perfect, punctual, prettiest daughter of this extraordinarily powerful matriarchal clan is a force with whom they must reckon.

And as much as her thoughts and actions on this Earth may be quotidian, the way she looks is out of this world. As she strides into the meeting precisely on time and in an outfit made up of colours found exclusively in nature – dark-green ankle-length dress, sand-coloured lace-up sandals and tree-bark Céline purse – the effect is like a photorealistic painting, meaning that the Kardashian on the TV screen feels more real than the Kardashian in the room. She's a jungle Aphrodite escaped from a forest of big-booby nymphs, with a mane as thick as a horse's and as black as volcanic rock. Her eyelashes flutter like teeny-tiny go-go dancers' fans. Her nails are small, elegant talons, painted a colour that manages to be both onyx and the bloodiest red. But it is Kardashian's body that is the thing, of course, and today, as always, her clothing is so tight it feels transgressive, clinging in particular to that strange, glorious butt, a formerly taboo body part that is now not only an inescapable part of the American erotic but also our best and most welcome distraction from climate change, income inequality and ISIS.

Kardashian, 34, is poised as she takes a seat at a conference table, greeting, "My team who is putting together our new website experience – I don't know if I want to call it a website, to disrespect it." Whalerock Industries develops Web-based, magazine-like, subscription-centred media on the Oprah model. It streams from her glam room and re-

al-time chats with fans, giving make-up tutorials and showcasing her favourite clothes. It's a digitally constructed Kardashian world, on top of the rest of the world, which Kardashian has already made bend to her will. Narcissism isn't Kardashian's thing, per se; it's solipsism, or a mode of living in which the world outside the self doesn't really, materially exist – that's the key here. In the past, she's put it this way: Her life is "like living on *The Truman Show*".

Now the group turns to a pack of "Kimojis" submitted by a graphic designer. "I wanted to do really fun, different emojis that you don't see on your phone," says Kardashian, then asks the group, "Is this designer Kanye-approved?"

Wielding a pen, she mulls over a long list of possible emojis, a mix of objects that she's come into contact with as well as people she knows, striking those that don't meet her approval. "A Speedo doesn't mean anything to me, same with disco-ball earrings," she says. She pauses at emojis of the other Kardashian women, raising the pen a little before swiping

with my family – I can't get any more comfortable than that.... But there's so much more to me than that, and I believe that I am so much smarter than I'm portrayed."

Who could have foreseen that in 2015 the Kardashians would be the most interesting story in America? But in terms of cultural fault lines, sometimes it seems like Kim Kardashian's creamy thighs bestride an entire nation. She's the immigrant daughter done good, the world's most famous Armenian-American. She's an interracial pioneer, a Caucasian woman married to a black rapper who pushes the boundaries of race not only in music, but also by demanding a ticket into the predominantly European club of fashion and design. She's at once a sexual muse sparking creativity in her husband, and also a working mum. She's outrageously feminine in an era of sex-role instability and gender-queer Miley, and also the stepdaughter of Caitlyn (nee Bruce) Jenner, the most famous transgender woman in the world. (When I share these thoughts with Kardashian, however, she

The Unstoppable Rise of Kim Kardashian

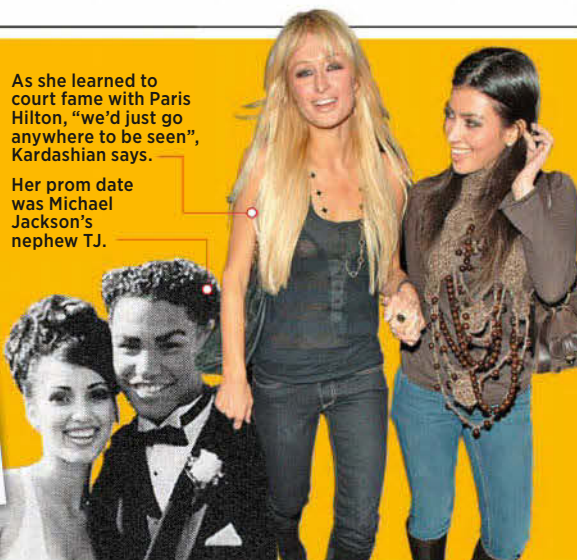
In the past decade, she's gone from Paris Hilton's BFF to reality star to post-modern multigenre mogul.

Young Kim grew up in L.A.

Her late father, Robert, was on O.J. Simpson's legal team.

As she learned to court fame with Paris Hilton, "we'd just go anywhere to be seen", Kardashian says.

Her prom date was Michael Jackson's nephew TJ.



again: "I don't want any family members in it," she says. "They'll all want a piece." She keeps going. "But I love a waist trainer, and a Kylie lip. A fur-kini is kind of cute, and a patent pink dress." She smiles. "Oh, a pregnant belly. I can't believe I didn't think of that."

KARDASHIAN MAY NOT COME OFF as book smart, but she is extremely savvy and possesses a high EQ, both of which are much more valuable in this day and age. The TV self and Kardashian's real self are "pretty much the same," she says, when asked to define the difference. "When I'm filming, when I'm in my most comfortable state, at my home,

says, "I don't look at myself like that. But my husband would.")

Kardashian is also at once extraordinarily human – don't you want to hear about the way she does her makeup? – and a master of what critic Jerry Saltz has called the "new uncanny", or art that blurs the line between human and a robot pretending to be a human. In her video game, you not only can change her clothes and hairstyle, but eye colour and skin colour. And over the course of the several times we meet, her skin shifts from a deep equatorial brown to a laid-out-in-Palm Springs honey to a morning soy creamer, depending on the makeup and tanning spray. "Something about Kim is very appealing to digital natives," says prominent

VANESSA GRIGORIADIS wrote about the founders of Tinder in November.

tech journalist and Re/code editor Kara Swisher. Kardashian also says things like this: "When I go on vacation, I only go to the beach certain times of the day, and lay out by the pool the rest of the time", because the sun is often too flat, and if someone takes a picture of her, she'll get caught looking less Kim Kardashian-like than she'd like. "In Miami, I'll get up at six and swim in the ocean at seven in the morning right before the harsh sun comes up – and the pictures always look amazing."

What else makes Kardashian so weirdly appealing? At one point, I begin telling her that I also think that in a country of dysfunctional families, the fact that her family communicates is also amazing, but all I can get out is "and the other thing about you that's appealing—" before she interrupts to say, "Right, I think it's great that the show is aspirational. I started off in a small apartment, and now I'm in this huge home." That someone might not find the Kardashians aspirational is simply something she would not consider. She's not conflicted about the point of life: It's to be happy

the woman who has made "a science of the selfie", as Instagram CEO Kevin Systrom puts it, adding, "Instagram wouldn't be the same without Kim."

Today, at first, there's a ban on selfies, enforced by a bodyguard and put into place in order to move people through as quickly as possible. After staring into the eyes of too many devastated teenagers, Kardashian soon overturns this decree. "If you're fast, you can take a selfie," she says, decisively. "That's what the book's about." Fans rotate in at an incredible clip, blurting out, "You're like a Barbie!" or, "You are a role model for my daughters", or, "I want to say, 'Fuck the haters', because you're amazing." Girls in pink bedazzled shirts reading ALL HAIL KKW tell her they missed school for this – "Oh, no, I don't want to get you in trouble!"

At the sight of her, gay men cry, and then recover quickly to take the perfect selfie. There are grandmas, a few straight guys and lots of people who just don't look like they should be here, which is what makes it hard to identify the half dozen or so animal-rights activists with sleeve tat-

THE ACTIVISTS WAITED OUTSIDE Barnes & Noble for Kardashian, but she outsmarted them, sending her car to idle at the front door while she sailed through the side. Today in Santa Monica, though, there isn't anyone on her tail, not even paparazzi. "I love these days when no one's following," she says, stepping into a black SUV and heading to Hillstone restaurant for lunch. Talking to Kardashian can be fun – when we first met, we spent 20 minutes talking about how we don't like dogs, and the kind of dogs we don't like – "I am so not the type of girl who carries a dog in my purse," she explains – though at other times, she's like a politician, answering the question she wants to hear instead of the one she was asked.

In an orange leather booth toward the back of Hillstone, Kardashian orders an average-size meal: grilled artichokes with a side of rémoulade, French fries and a veggie burger without the bun. Her weight is a touchy issue. She eats about half of what she's served, with perfect table manners and a neatness that includes absent-mind-

On the sex tape: "I don't really think about it. When I get over something, I get over it."



Keeping Up With the Kardashians debuted in 2007, spawning several spinoffs and making them the first family of reality TV.

With her mum and mentor, Kris. "Between all us girls, we have 300 million followers on social media," says Kris.



Kim on Kanye: "We're opposites. I calm him down, and he pumps me up."

and make money, and she's doing both. Kardashian is a nice person – there's no way to spend time with her and not come away with that impression.

Does she hear the haters, sharpening their sticks over her Pandora-like release of crass commercialism and oversharing on the world? She doesn't read anything about herself anymore, not tabloids, no Google alerts, nothing. Nevertheless, the hate came to her one day in May at Barnes & Noble in Manhattan at the book signing of *Selfish*, a book consisting of a collection of her selfies from the past eight years. Inside the midtown shop, she sat on a carpeted dais surrounded by 300 fans, few of whom had shown up for a signed book – they wanted selfies with their selfie idol,

toos and gauge earrings in the line, who wait until they're right in front of Kardashian's dais before beginning to attack. "Fifty animals skinned for one fur coat, and you dress your kid like that?" they angrily shriek at Kardashian. "Shame on you!" "You're the most disgusting human being on the planet!"

Kardashian's face freezes, the lips in a rictus grin. This is a special day, and they will not ruin it – she will not allow it. The bodyguard disappears the angry activists, and soon everything's back to normal, with another teenage fan worshipping at the altar. "You've inspired me to be hot and famous," she says. The two of them take a pouty-face selfie. "Aw," says Kardashian. "I love you."

edly folding and unfolding her white cloth napkin after the meal has been cleared.

For a while, Kardashian talks about growing up, the way that her dad, Robert, was the disciplinarian and her mum, Kris, a born-and-bred California girl who met Robert at a racetrack while clad in a snappy outfit paired with a necklace reading OH SHIT, was a fun-loving yet warlike Mother Goddess who would do anything to protect her baby gods: Khloe, a spitfire Athena, with a thunderbolt of jokes; Kourtney, puss-faced Hestia, keeping close to the house; Rob, a jolly Apollo; and Kim, steady and sweet. From Armenia, Robert Kardashian's family immigrated to California early in the 20th century and pursued the American dream by making a fortune in

the meatpacking industry. Robert got out of the family business and was a success, founding the influential music-industry publication and conference *Radio & Records*, and then selling music and videos to movie theatres to run before the films.

"Music was always such a huge part of our life," says Kim. "As kids, we were at concerts like Michael Jackson every weekend. My first concert was Earth, Wind and Fire. I was so young – we were walking to our seats, the lights went off, and I was so scared." She describes superstar manager Irving Azoff as being "as close as an uncle". He says the young Kim was "a bright light destined for great things, and always a great little businesswoman. I coached her soccer team and, once, she said, 'I don't want to play goalie, but for \$100 I'll be goalie', and she actually convinced me to give it to her."

As an adolescent, she liked Smokey Robinson and Stevie Wonder, and played Mary J. Blige and Jodeci on her bedroom record player. "I still make mix CDs," she says. "I have an older computer with a disk drive so I can do it." In high school, she was obsessed with 'NSync and the Backstreet Boys – "really obsessed, though I was more of a Backstreet girl". She also listened to Snoop, Dre and Ice Cube. Did she daydream about being a girl in a rap video? "No," she says. "The runners at my dad's office would say, 'I can't wait until she's 18, I want to go on a date with her', and I'd be like, 'Not a chance, get away.' I always had a boyfriend. I loved having a boyfriend."

In her teens, she dated TJ Jackson, Michael Jackson's nephew, for several years. Her dad "explained to me that he's had a lot of interracial friends, and it might not be the easiest relationship. He said I should prepare myself for people to say things to me.... When I was growing up, when I was in high school, I'd get magazines and see interracial couples and think, 'They are so cute.' I've always been attracted to a certain kind of look." Of the Jacksons, she says, "They were the nicest family I've ever met.... Michael definitely was never this disreputable person."

When Kardashian was 10 years old, her parents divorced, with her mother quickly marrying Jenner. The kids split their time between their parents' homes, though Kim was living at her dad's house when O.J. Simpson was accused of murder in 1994. Simpson briefly moved into Robert's house, living in Khloe's room. "It was surreal, with Johnnie Cochran and Robert Shapiro and all these guys having meetings at my dad's house," she says. Kris was

close with Nicole Brown Simpson and believed that O.J. was guilty, creating a massive amount of tension in the family. "I definitely took my dad's side," Kim says. "We just always thought my dad was the smartest person in the world, and he really believed in his friend." As far as what she believes now, she says, "It's weird. I just try not to think about it."

Kardashian doesn't drink or do drugs except for "five shots of vodka in Vegas



MOGUL, MODEL, MOTHER

With daughter North. Does she want to be remembered as a businesswoman or a sex symbol? "Both," she says. "You can have it all."

every three years," she says. Envisioning herself as a clothing-boutique owner, she took college classes locally but didn't graduate, and her rebellion from her family, if there was one, was her getting secretly married to music producer Damon Thomas at 20. "She was a teenager then, and teenagers do a lot of crazy things," Kris Jenner says. Kardashian explains it this way: "I was very happy at home learning how to cook and clean and keep a house. I knew that was where I wanted to end up."

In 2003, Robert Kardashian died suddenly of cancer, and in 2004, Kim's marriage broke up. Soon, she was rolling with Paris Hilton and the "celebutante" crew. "We'd go anywhere and everywhere just to be seen," Kardashian says, matter-of-factly. "We knew exactly where to go, where to be seen, how to have something writ-

ten about you. All you had to do is go to this restaurant, or this party, talk about whatever you want to talk about, and it would be in the paper the next day." What about the phase when some members of the clique, most notably Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton, were caught by paps exiting cars without underwear? "I rarely wear underwear, but that never happened to me," she says. "I was never drinking.... I think that saved me a lot."

In 2007, she passed Hilton in terms of popularity by enduring an infamous sex-tape scandal. She heard rumours in L.A. that the tape she made with her ex-boyfriend Ray J, the singer Brandy's kid brother, was making the rounds, but "I just never thought [the rumours] were real," she says. Then, "I was on a trip to New York, and I'd landed, and then someone called me – maybe my sister? I didn't have a BlackBerry then.... I think I went right to my mum's house, and she was there with me every step of the way. She didn't call me screaming or call me crying. She was just there. She was like, 'I don't know what you want me to do.' So we went through it." How did she stay sane? "There was a period of time when I just stayed home. Khloe's like, 'I've never met someone who's moved back in with her mother as many times as you.'"

Given that Hilton had experience with a sex tape too, did Kardashian commiserate with Hilton about the scandal? "No," she says. "I don't think she was that happy. We didn't really talk about it. I probably would have thought, 'Oh, my gosh, let me give her advice', but we had no communication. But our friendship had fizzled before that." Did she ever figure out who leaked the tape? "We did, and we're in major confidentiality, so I can't talk about it." Does she still think about the fact that a great deal of humanity has seen her in *flagrante*? She folds the napkin in half, and then in a neat square. "I don't really think about it," she says quietly. "I thought about it for a long time. But when I get over something, I get over it."

AS KARDASHIAN FINISHES HER meal, saying, "I've got to get this food out of my face", I ask the question that must be put to her after Lena Dunham, a prominent feminist if there ever was one, posed, unironically, with a copy of *Selfish*: "Kim Kardashian, are you a feminist?"

"I've never really been one on labels, and I don't like to push my view," she says, folding the napkin again. "If I feel something, it's how I feel. I never say, 'I feel this way, so

you should feel that way.' Not that there's anything wrong with it, but I just am who I am. But, yeah." She smiles. "I think you would call me a feminist."

Kardashian has not extensively studied the knowledge found in schools; she draws money and power toward her by the force of intuition. On her show, she and her sisters have their own language on issues more complex than glam rooms: They don't know things, they feel things; they don't want something, they deserve it. At the same time that they have championed the waist-trainer product, which bears much resemblance to a Victorian corset, they also exhibit an attitude toward their bodies that can only be called revolutionary. Women have long asked for fair vagina representation in media, for their vaginas not only to be sexual objects but to smell and bleed and pop out babies, and on their show, Kardashian vaginas do all that and more, which is very different than other pop-culture vaginas.

And if you doubt they are influential, consider that "between all us girls, we have 300 million followers on social media," says Kris. Here is the way Kardashian describes some of her selfies: "I do shoots that are nude, and I don't want to say every girl, but all my girlfriends send me these sexy selfies of themselves," she says. "Just being like, 'Oh, my God, I've been working out for two weeks – look at how good of shape I'm in.' Girls send them to each other. I don't want to say it's normal, but it's just what I've been used to.... And I think it's part of the whole selfie phenomenon." So it's not about the male gaze? "I guess not," she says uncertainly. "You wouldn't send the picture if you didn't like it."

I next ask, "But when you look at sexy pictures of yourself, is it sexually exciting?" She shakes her head violently, quickly changing the subject. So I say, "In 20 years, do you want to be remembered as a sex symbol or a businesswoman or what?" She says, "Both. I think you can be both. You can have it all."

We start talking about West. Is she his muse, or is he her consort? Here's the way she describes their relationship: "I think we're definitely opposites. I calm him down, and he pumps me up." When they're home, I ask, does West rant and rave while she's secretly praying he would be quiet? "No," she says, stiffening a little. "At home, he loves to watch movies. Anything animated he'll watch with North."

West doesn't want to be on *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, which is why he isn't, most of the time. "And I respect that," she says. "You can't expect me to jump up onstage and start singing – it's not what I do." But he has spent the past few years

dressings his wife. "The makeover Kanye has given me is amazing," she says. She's set a fashion trend – pairing a blouse as tight as a leotard with an overcoat – and was early to the current contouring fad in makeup. "I'm obsessed with contouring," she says. "My nose is a completely different nose because of contouring." Would she have started wearing runway fashion if she hadn't married West? "No," she says, then reconsiders. "Well, you know what? I think it would have taken me a lot longer to figure it out."

West is the product of a strong mother, to whom he was famously devoted, and it makes sense that he's found his way into the Kardashian matriarchy. If Kris says she is Kim's "twin soul", and Kim says she's Kanye's "twin soul", where does Kris

**KARDASHIAN SAYS
KANYE REACTED TO
CAITLYN JENNER'S
CHANGE BY SAYING,
"IF YOU CAN'T BE
AUTHENTIC AND
YOU CAN'T LIVE
YOUR LIFE, WHAT
DO YOU HAVE?"**

fit into Kim and Kanye's relationship? "A lot of people don't see the real, soft, wonderful side of Kanye," says Kris. "We fell in love with who Kim fell in love with. I will never be able to replace the relationship he had with his mum, but I sure can make him know he's loved, unconditionally, and we would do anything for him."

But what about the matriarchy's relationship to the men in their lives? Many who have heard their siren call end up on the rocks, one way or another. Marriages flounder, substance problems are rampant, and even brother Rob has vanished from the TV show. "It's not that mysterious, what's happening with Rob," Kardashian says. "He has gained weight. He feels uncomfortable being on the show, and that's OK." She pauses. "Do I think he smokes weed, drinks beer, hangs out and plays video games with his friends all day long? Yes." Is she sure that it's not more like hookers and meth at the Ritz? "No, no," she says, laughing a little. "Or he'd be skinny."

The situation with Caitlyn Jenner is more complicated. "I'd heard a rumour when I was 11 or 12 that he was caught cross-dressing," she says. And then, when she was 22, she walked in on Jenner dressed up in the garage. "I was shaking," she says. "I didn't know if I'd just found out his deepest, darkest secret, and he was going to come after me. I grabbed my duf-

fel bag...ran out to the car." Jenner called her on the phone a half hour later, and said, "One day, I'll talk to you about this. Until then, don't tell a soul." I said, "OK." Eight years later, when she was 30 years old, he said, "Let's have that talk."

Before their wedding, Kardashian told West what she knew about Jenner. "I wasn't sure if Bruce was going to be comfortable walking me down the aisle. He had just had his trachea shaved, so I knew something was going on. I thought that Kanye should know that this is the reality about one of his daughter's grandparents." She was afraid of what West might think. "[Kanye] obviously moves to his own drum," she says. "He lives his life the way he wants, a really authentic life, and he was like, 'If you can't be authentic and you can't live your life, what do you have?'"

BACK IN THE SUV AFTER the meal, Kardashian starts talking about her blonde hair, and the way gossip blogs were confused about why she so quickly dyed it back to black. She wanted it dark for a trip to Armenia, plus what pregnant woman wants chemicals on her hair? "I'd have done anything for this [pregnancy] to work out," she says, then looks at me hard. It's a scoop, I think – am I grateful? "Anyway," she says, turning to look out the window, "that's one of the reasons I dyed it back." She pats her stomach. "That was the most satisfying meal, you have no idea. It's going to keep me full."

What else should one know about Kim Kardashian? She's a prolific handwritten-thank-you-card sender, and a devoted watcher of *Dateline* and forensic TV shows. She's not allergic to anything and doesn't usually drink coffee because she's "not into the taste." She won't eat anything with mustard – or sardines, escargot, "anything like that. Kanye can be more of a fancy eater than me." She's taking piano lessons – is that hard? "Um, I mean, it's just if you put the time into it," she says. She's also a car girl: "Cars don't mean anything to Kanye – he hasn't bought a new car in seven years. I have a personal relationship to my cars." She adds, "I love, love, love a Rolls-Royce. I know this may sound bratty, but I'll own up to it: It's the best car if you have kids, spacewise. It's low, and I like a low car to put in the car seat and the baby."

The SUV begins rolling into the loading dock of a furniture store, where she's meeting Kris and Kylie to tape a little bit of the TV show. If the show were a total lie, it would never work; but one imagines that it is not completely real, either. "Oh, good, the lighting panel is here," [Cont. on 104]

Up In the Air

Last year, a young man

walked into the Seattle

airport and took the

next flight to anywhere

— and he hasn't come

down since

By Ben Wofford

THE BOARDING PROCEDURE has barely started at Chicago O'Hare, and Ben Schlappig has already taken over the first-class cabin. Inside Cathay Pacific Flight 807 bound for Hong Kong, he's passing out a couple of hundred dollars' worth of designer chocolates to a small swarm of giggling flight attendants. The six suites in this leather-bound playpen of faux mahogany and fresh-cut flowers comprise the inner sanctum of commercial flight that few ever witness. They're mostly empty now, save for two men in their

*Photographs by
Bryan Derballa*



Terminal Life

*Ben Schlappig
in one of the
many airports
he calls home.
He says this
year he has
flown more
than 645,000
kilometres.*

twenties who seem even giddier than the flight attendants. The two stand to greet him. "This is so cool!" exclaims one, and soon Schlappig is ordering champagne for everyone.

This sort of thing happens to Schlappig nearly everywhere he goes. On this trip, his fans will witness Schlappig's latest mission: a weekend jaunt that will slingshoot him across East Asia – Hong Kong, Jakarta, Tokyo – and back to New York, in 69 hours. He'll rarely leave the airports, and when he does he'll rest his head only in luxury hotels. With wide ears, Buddy Holly glasses and a shock of strawberry-blond hair, Schlappig resembles Ralphie from *A Christmas Story* if he'd grown up to become a J. Crew model. Back beyond the curtain in business class, a dozen jowly faces cast a stony gaze on the crescendos of laughter and spilled champagne – another spoiled trust-fund kid, they've judged, living off his parents' largesse. But Schlappig has a job. This is his job.

Schlappig, 25, is one of the biggest stars among an elite group of obsessive flyers whose mission is to outwit the airlines. They're self-styled competitors with a singular objective: fly for free, as much as they can, without getting caught. In the past 20 years, the Internet has drawn together this strange band of savants with an odd mix of skills: the digital talent of a code writer, a lawyer's love affair with fine print, and a passion for airline bureaucracy. It's a whirring hive mind of IT whizzes, stats majors, aviation nerds and everyone else you knew who skipped the formal.

Schlappig owes his small slice of fame to his blog "One Mile at a Time", a diary of a young man living the life of the world's most implausible airline ad. Posting as often as six times a day, he metes out meticulous counsel on the art of travel hacking – known in this world as the Hobby. It's not simply how-to tips that draw his fans, it's the vicarious thrill of Schlappig's non-stop-luxury life – one recent flight with a personal shower and butler service, or the time Schlappig was chauffeured across a tarmac in a Porsche. But his fans aren't just travel readers – they're gamers, and Schlappig is teaching them how to win.

"I'm very fortunate in that I do what I love," says Schlappig, stretching out in an ergonomic armchair as we reach 30,000 feet and just before the mushroom consommé arrives. In the past year, since ditching the Seattle apartment he shared with his ex-boyfriend, he's flown more than 645,000 kilometres, enough to circumnavigate the globe 16 times. It's been 43 exhausting weeks since he slept in a bed that wasn't in a hotel, and he spends an

His mission is to outwit the airlines and fly first class, for free, as much as he can, without getting caught.

average of six hours daily in the sky. He has a freewheeling itinerary, often planning his next destination upon hitting the airport. Just last week, he rocketed through Dallas, Dubai, Oman, Barcelona and Frankfurt. Yet for all his travel, it would be a mistake to call Schlappig a nomad. The moment that he whiffs the airless ambience of a pressurised cabin, he's home.

"An airplane is my bedroom," he says, stretching to reach his complimentary slippers. "It's my office, and it's my playroom." The privilege of reclining in this personal suite costs around \$15,000. Schlappig typically makes this trip when he's bored on the weekend. He pays for it like he pays for everything: with a sliver of his gargantuan cache of frequent-flyer miles that grows only bigger by the day. Hong Kong, he says, is his favourite hub, and "the only

city I could ever live in". The 16-hour trip has become so routine that it's begun to feel like a pajama-clad blur of champagne and caviar – or, in Schlappig's terminology, a "two-hangover flight".

As the sun descends over the polar circle, a recumbent Schlappig loses himself in a *2 Broke Girls* marathon playing on a free-standing flatscreen. "The fact is, we are beating the airlines at their own game," he said last year at a gathering of the Hobby's top talent. "The people who run these programs are idiots." Then he paused. "And we'll always be one step ahead of them."

SCHLAPPIG WASN'T SO MUCH INTRODUCED to his fixation as he was raised by it. Born in New York, he became obsessed with airplanes as a small child, endlessly reciting aircraft models and issuing flight announcements from the back of his parents' car. "Benjamin was always different than my two other boys," says his mum, Barbara. "Teachers told me, 'He's ahead of everything.' He was bored."

Around age 13, he discovered the website FlyerTalk, a massive free-for-all forum of all things airline, where users meet to strategise over deals, test for cracks in the bureaucracy and share the spoils. There, Schlappig found a global community playing a massively complex game set upon three basic components.

One of the fundamental steps a Hobbyist can take is choosing an airline to compete for top-tier loyalty status; Schlappig chose United. Nothing was free up front – the object of the game was a return on investment. A Hobbyist doesn't spend unless he can get the same or greater value in return. It took Schlappig about a year to master the dozens of convoluted techniques, exploiting mistakes in ticketing algorithms and learning the ins and outs of the frequent-flyer programs airlines had created after deregulation in the late 1970s. The second leg of the game is credit cards – collecting and cancelling as many as possible, and deploying a series of tricks to reap the reward points that bank-and-airline-card partnerships would virtually give away. As he delved deeper, Schlappig learned about a third level, a closely guarded practice called Manufacture Spend, where Hobbyists harness the power of the multitudes of credit cards in their pockets. Airline-affiliated credit cards award points for every dollar spent, so over the decades, Hobbyists manipulated the system by putting purchases on credit cards without ultimately spending anything at all. At its simplest, this included purchasing dollar coins from the U.S. Mint with a credit card and immediately using them to pay off the charge. Schlappig read one detailed post after another that insisted Manufacture Spend was the only true way to fly for free – like sliding a coin into a slot machine and yanking it back with clear string.

Eventually, the best way he learned to visualise this bureaucratic gamesmanship was to see it as a series of table games on a sprawling casino floor – and if the airlines were the house, Schlappig realised, the Hobbyists were the card-counters.

Exceptionally bright and equally motivated, Schlappig saw a way of convincing his parents: by showing them how they could visit family in Germany paying less in first class than flying economy. From there, his parents grew to fully indulge his obsession. By the time he was 15, they were delivering him to the airport on Saturdays and retrieving him Sunday nights at baggage claim. "It was an interesting hobby," says his dad, Arno, as cicadas chirp outside the St. Petersburg, Florida, condo their son bought them after the blog took off. "I said, 'Hey! Keep it up. It's better than smoking pot.'" On a typical weekend, Schlappig would hopscotch to the West Coast and back – Tampa, Chicago, San Francisco, L.A., never exiting the airports. "Some of his friends knew," Arno says. "The teachers I don't think were aware of it."

This is BEN WOFFORD's first ROLLING STONE piece. He travelled to three countries for this story as Schlappig's guest.

Despite his high IQ, Schlappig was an apathetic student. He attended an all-boys Catholic school, where he struggled to fit in. “When his homework was done, he went back to his room on FlyerTalk,” Arno recalls. “And he just posted and posted.” Hobbyists say the game takes years to master. But at 16, Schlappig became the first known member to fly across the Pacific Ocean six times in one trip – Chicago, Osaka, San Francisco, Seoul and back again – in July 2006. By his 17th birthday, he’d logged half a million miles. That year, Schlappig was elected to FlyerTalk’s governing TalkBoard; in 2009, he ascended to vice president, second to Gary Leff, now 40, one of the Hobby’s most popular bloggers. (Schlappig calls Leff “the

the only thing that seemed to calm her son. They drove to the airport and sat together in silence, watching the airplanes take off and land. “His eyes were all sparkled,” she says, remembering their daylong outings.

Eventually, the family relocated to Tampa, where Ben attended grade school and discovered his obsession. “You know, in retrospect, they were crazy for letting me fly,” Ben says. Marc was 14 going on 30 – overstressed and Ivy League-bound, intensely focused on planning for law school while studying French and Latin on top of his native German and English. Then, one day, he was gone. “By the time it came around to me,” Ben continues, “the approach my mum had was, ‘Life is too short not to take up what you love.’”

Throughout high school, his jet-setting accelerated, as he crisscrossed the country on his beloved United Airlines. For the first time, he had found a place to belong. When Ben was 16, he earned elite status, proudly brandishing his Premier 1K card wherever he flew. He found he connected socially with Hobbyists far better than with classmates, and he started organising meet-ups around the country, advertising them on FlyerTalk.

In the autumn of 2007, Schlappig enrolled at the only college he applied to, the University of Florida, without ever visiting. He was bored almost instantly, filling the emptiness with travel and FlyerTalk. The following February, Schlappig launched “One Mile at a Time”, and he began speaking at airline-sponsored events, wonky consortiums where airline employees and frequent flyers could mingle. It was at one such gathering at San Francisco International in 2009 that the 19-year-old Schlappig met Alex Pourazari, another teenager who’d become a member of Schlappig’s rapidly growing following. “I was

such a fanboy – so embarrassing,” recalls Pourazari. “I still have that adoring e-mail I sent him. It cracks me up. I go look at it sometimes, just to remind myself how far we’ve come.” The two quickly became best friends, together plotting ever-more-dizzying flight routes to challenge each other’s game.

“We were like brothers,” says Pourazari, who now lives in Seattle. “It was more like we were best friends than anything. Then we both realised that we were gay. And we grew up together.”

They logged hundreds of hours in the air together, rarely leaving airports. This practice – called mileage running, or flying incessantly on steeply discounted flights to accrue frequent-flyer miles – is a foundation of the Hobby, what dribbling is to basketball. Schlappig and Pourazari took their first mileage run on Valentine’s Day 2010. On one run, they hit seven airports from Tampa en route to Hawaii, turning straight back without even breathing the air in the parking lot.

For the next year and a half, as their friendship grew into a romance, they continued to perfect their techniques; one favourite was called flight bumping. At the time, airlines often oversold their flights, and passengers who voluntarily gave up their seats got a free ride on the next one, plus a \$400 voucher. Oversold flights are supposedly chance occurrences, but using software popularised in the Hobby for collating obscure Federal Aviation Administration data, Schlappig and Pourazari became masters of predicting when flights would bump. It was free money. The two would stand side by side in front of a terminal’s sprawling



The High Life

“An airplane is my bedroom,” says Schlappig, who’s flown enough this year to circumnavigate the globe 16 times. “It’s my office, it’s my playground. I’m very fortunate to do what I love.”

Godfather” of the Hobby; the two e-mail each other daily.)

“I was scared at the beginning,” Barbara says. “I mean, what mum lets her son fly at such a young age around the country, right?” U.S. air marshals wondered the same thing when they once hauled Schlappig off a plane after glimpsing his baffling itinerary, demanding to speak to his parents. “I think the reason they let him fly around as a kid, and why they let him follow his passion,” says one friend close to the Schlappig family, “was because they already had one kid who basically left too early.”

B

EN WAS THREE WHEN HIS ELDEST brother, Marc, just days after his 14th birthday, was killed in a horrific accident. He’d been riding a jetski his parents had rented when a drunk driver struck him with a boat. The family was devastated, and for young Ben the loss was particularly hard. His father, who worked for a bank, was only around on

weekends. “Marc had been like a father to Ben,” Barbara says. “He was everything.”

For the next year, Ben refused to go to preschool, and when he did, the teachers couldn’t stop his screaming. Eventually they told Barbara to keep Ben home. On the worst days, Barbara did

monitors, arguing over the best contenders like they were picking greyhounds at the track.

Soon, Schlappig began studying the rules of so-called apology vouchers. As a conciliatory gesture for anything broken on a given flight, United offered coupons to passengers worth \$200 or \$400. Every time he boarded a plane, Schlappig looked for something broken – a headset or an overhead light – and racked up the coupons. “When a system can easily be exploited, it’s tempting to push it to its limits, for the game of it alone,” Schlappig says. “Especially combined with the arrogant confidence only a teenager can have.”

During his senior year, he carelessly bragged to a *New York Times* travel reporter that he had amassed more than \$10,000 in bumping vouchers. A few weeks later, Schlappig says, just before his last college final exam, in April 2011, he received a certified letter from United, cheerily informing him that because he had taken advantage of the system his frequent-flyer account was permanently suspended. He was banned from flying, he recalls the letter saying, unless he paid the company \$4,755 – the amount it claimed as losses through Schlappig’s techniques.

“I mean, how do you define ‘taking advantage of?’” Schlappig asks, passing a hand towel back to a doting attendant as we fly over the South China Sea. “Was I seriously inconvenienced to the tune of \$200 every time my audio wasn’t working? No. But they create the system.” (United officials will not comment on the record on Schlappig’s case, other than to say, “We don’t take steps

“There’s a joke: I’m not heterosexual, I’m not homosexual, I’m arosexual,” says Schlappig’s ex-boyfriend.

toward limiting member engagement with the program unless we see acts of fraud or other serious violations.”) Schlappig has repeatedly offered to send United a cheque but has gotten no response. “While it doesn’t justify anything, I think it became more about the game in those years,” he says. “And while I was far from the only one playing, I thought I was the best.”

Just weeks after receiving his banishment letter from United, Schlappig graduated with a degree in marketing. He stayed in Tampa, still dating Pourazari by airplane, and after going on a few corporate interviews, he decided to take a chance and turn the Hobby into a career. That summer, with Pourazari on board, he incorporated PointsPros, a consultancy that helps customers build itineraries out of frequent-flyer miles.

“We were just plane geeks, plain and simple,” Pourazari says. He stops midsentence on the phone to call out the models of planes as they pass over his balcony. “There’s a joke: I’m not heterosexual, I’m not homosexual, I’m arosexual.”

With their inscrutably complex rules, the airlines had created a market of hopelessly confused vacationers, and PointsPros immediately found itself in demand. After a year of dealing with a staggering workload and a long-distance relationship, Schlappig decided to move in with Pourazari in the Seattle suburb of Bellevue. During the move, in the autumn of 2012, Schlappig met with fellow Hobbyist Tiffany Funk in O’Hare, and he recruited her to join the company. She arrived to find the pair on the brink of a stress-induced implosion. “Things grew really fast,” recalls Funk, 31, who lives with her husband in San Diego. “And Ben was totally not prepared.”

After a year, Schlappig’s relationship with Pourazari completely unwound, and Schlappig found little holding him to the ground. “At that point, I was like, ‘Screw it,’” he remembers. “I

decided I might as well do this full-time.” In April 2014, at the end of his lease, he walked into Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. He hasn’t come down since.

IN 1979, AS DEREGULATION TRANSFORMED the airline business from a monitored public good into corporate America’s new Wild West, an ad executive named Bill Bernbach hatched a marketing scheme that would change air travel forever, by incentivizing sporadic customers to become returning flyers. Bernbach proposed to his client American Airlines that it reward customers with free travel. Two years later, the first frequent-flyer program was born, and the rest of the industry scrambled to join the arms race.

The Hobby followed soon after, pioneered by a triumphant menswear clothing manager and moonlighting aviation nut named Randy Petersen, of Sioux City, Iowa. In 1986, Petersen founded an aviation magazine called *Inside Flyer* with \$800 and no publishing experience. “I’m not a business guy, I’m a surfer-dude guy,” Petersen says. “I kind of figured out how to earn free travel when these programs were just starting out.” In a bright-yellow trucker hat over wild bleach-white hair, the 63-year-old looks like a cross between Jesse Ventura and Doc Watson from

Back to the Future. Early editions of Petersen’s magazine featured stories on deals from obscure carriers; instructed fliers on how to duck airline countermeasures; and showed readers how they could win a thousand free miles by subscribing to magazines like *Esquire*. By 1993, *Inside Flyer* had 90,000 readers. Two years later, Petersen took the community online as FlyerTalk.

Almost at once, FlyerTalk became the singular worldwide hub of airline nerds, and today it claims to have more than 500,000 members. Virtually nothing on FlyerTalk is meant to be understood by outsiders. Posts there are littered with jargon like “3xx” (Airbus), “open jaw” (three-segment round trip) and “FEBO” (in-flight meal delivery). So Petersen’s next move was to launch BoardingArea, a content platform for public consumption that featured FlyerTalk’s biggest stars on their own blogs.

This was where Schlappig launched “One Mile at a Time.” Immediately he became one of the Hobby’s biggest stars and, according to his friends, a millionaire. His revenue comes from three sources: impression-based ads on the blog; the PointsPros consultancy; and “affiliate marketing,” which means collecting a commission from credit-card companies each time a card sign-up originates from his blog. Schlappig admits that affiliate marketing gives him a vested interest in the very companies that many Hobbyists game. A garden-variety Hobbyist owns at least a dozen credit cards; many have more than 40.

Amassing a large cache of credit cards is essential to Manufacture Spend. No topic of discussion produces more worried glances or tighter lips – a code of silence is central to Hobby culture. Manufacture Spend reveals a fundamental but overlooked truth about frequent-flyer miles: They’ve become, in essence, a currency. In 2012, a European Central Bank paper classified airline miles in the same category as bitcoin, citing a 2005 calculation by *The Economist* that valued the global stock of frequent-flyer miles at more than \$700 billion. But if miles are currency, then airlines are like central bankers who can constantly change the rules, devalue the points and close accounts at will. In 2009, one frequent flyer sued Northwest Airlines for closing his account, insisting that he never broke the program rules. The case rose to the Supreme Court, which sided with Northwest last year, reasoning that the 1970s deregulation left the terms of

these programs entirely up to the airlines. In essence, airlines, not customers, owned the frequent-flyer miles, and an airline's latitude for shuttering an account is wide – similar to the right casinos enjoy to kick out card-counters.

Schlappig is giving me this economics lesson while he waits in the spa of the first-class Virgin Atlantic Clubhouse in JFK Airport in New York. He has been up all night, downing eight cups of coffee and typing blog posts the entire flight; he maintains a militant work regimen, blogging only on Eastern time, jet lag be damned. "I think he's not a person who was meant to work from nine to five," says his mother. "Now he probably works 18 hours a day." Schlappig is chatting through a complimentary massage, enjoying the elbow in his back from a plump spa therapist and straining occasionally to sip his dry gin with crème de mûre. She chats him back, smiling, and asks how he's been – Schlappig knows almost the entire staff here by name, and he schedules his globe-trots to make a pit stop here every few weeks.

He's treated equally well by flight attendants, who are among his rowdiest fans. When a chief steward recognised him on one superluxury carrier, Schlappig stepped into his onboard shower to find a bottle of Dom Pérignon on ice waiting for him. On a recent international flight, an attendant maneuvered an unwitting Schlappig into an empty row, administering what he delicately terms a surprising and unwanted hand job. ("It was a disaster," he says. "I tried to get out, but there was no point.")

Despite his success, many in the Hobby think the days of hopscotching across the globe are numbered. Paranoia is the lingua franca of all Hobbyists, and now is a good time to be pessimistic. Earlier this year, Delta and United both switched to revenue-based reward systems: Frequent-flyer miles are now awarded by total dollars spent, effectively ending the practice of mileage running. Schlappig seems unconcerned. "I've been at this for 10 years," he says. "And there's not a single year where I didn't hear at one point or another, 'This is coming to an end.' But every year, we find new opportunities. We're one step ahead of them."

For some, the game has evolved from a wonkish pastime into an ends-justified obsession with beating the airlines – less *Rain Man*, more *Ocean's Eleven*. While the game's traditional methods remain technically legal, these Hobbyists – imagine them as the Deep Web of the Hobby – use tactics that routinely violate airline terms and conditions, techniques that can span a gradient from clever and harmless to borderline theft. (Schlappig concedes that he pushes the rules but insists he is careful not to break any laws.) Take the practice of "hidden-city ticketing" – booking your layover as your final destination, like buying a ticket from Point A to Point C, then sneaking away at B – or "fuel dumping", a booking technique that confuses the price algorithm to deduct the cost of fuel from a ticket, often at an enormous discount. In this strange and risky world, black markets exist where brokers buy and sell miles, and Hobbyists pay others to fly in their names.

They also write custom code to hunt the Web for "mistake fares" posted accidentally by airlines and hotels. "My friend can

write one of these scripts in two hours," one Hobbyist tells me. "These are huge companies, and they don't write a simple code to double-check their prices. It blows me away." He recently used a custom script to book a Westin presidential suite for \$10.

"These people have the ability to cause serious financial harm," says Henry Hartevelde, an industry analyst and former airline loyalty-program manager. Hartevelde has spent decades studying the Hobby and the airlines – a war of attrition, he says, between two equally obsessive tribes with very long memories. "No one's hands are clean in this fight," he adds. "The gamers have dirt on their hands, and airlines have dirt on their hands." For now, the Hobby's principal advantage remains its size – tiny enough, he says, to avoid the attention of the airlines' gargantuan bureaucracy. But for Hobbyists tempted by dreams of mastering the game and beating the house, Hartevelde offers a warning. "Ultimately," he says, "the house always wins."



Winging It

Schlappig enjoying the benefits of his first-class life (above). He's been obsessed with planes since he was a boy (right, with his brother Michael). "Who lets her son fly at such a young age around the country?" says their mum. "But Ben's not a person meant to work nine to five."



FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS, THE commercial airline industry has been mulling how to solve a problem like the Hobby. "The airlines basically thought they could manage it down," Hartevelde says. "Today, they'll never be able to shut it down entirely." For years, a de facto standoff ensued, with each side equally invested in keeping the travel-going public none the wiser.

This past year, however, the airlines seemed to have unveiled a new strategy. Following the example of the music industry in the early 2000s,

they have taken to suing small fry in the interest of making an example. In November, United joined the travel site Orbitz in a lawsuit against a 22-year-old computer-science major named Aktarer Zaman, creator of the website Skiplagged, a Hobbyist version of Expedia that's brought the technique of hidden-city ticketing into mass consumption. In April, an Illinois judge threw out the claim; United has vowed to appeal.

"They're using the public's lack of knowledge

in order to profit greatly," says Zaman, a stick-thin kid who looks barely old enough to shave, stuttering in a nervous mumble. "I'm helping increase the efficiency of the market. This is good for society." Zaman reads Schlappig's blog, and in January he appeared with him on HuffPost Live, where they defended the practice.

Last December, Schlappig joined a slate of popular Boarding-Area bloggers at the Frequent Traveler University, a weekend boot camp hosted at a Hyatt in Arlington, Virginia. Roughly 150 people assembled for the advanced seminar's three days of PowerPoints from the Hobby's top talent; most of those in attendance are white and in middle management or IT, but plenty are college kids.

Inside a jam-packed seminar room, Schlappig delivers an emphatic lecture on complex flight segments. He's followed by his fellow bloggers – speaking at a white-hot clip in the alien dialect of airline legal departments. A chiselled twentysomething named Scott Mackenzie makes his case for why airline [Cont. on 105]

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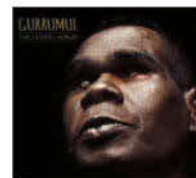
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Gurrumul's Gospel Evolution



Arnhem Land enigma goes to church without major incident



Gurrumul

The Gospel Album
Skinnyfish/MGM



BY MICHAEL DWYER

When news of this album leaked, expectations of a dramatic recasting of Gurrumul's extraordinary voice naturally rose. Imagine that impossibly plaintive instrument murmuring against a humming black American choir; rising on a tide of lung-busting hallelujahs and handclaps as a Hammond organ rocks the pews. Talk about a potent brew of cultural cross-pollination. As it happens, the gospel according to Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu is much closer to home. His third studio outing under the stewardship of Melbourne bassist Michael Hohnen is a slow, gentle, atmospheric hymnbook remembered from Sunday sing-alongs in the Elcho Island church of his Methodist upbringing.

There are some subtle sonic developments whispering beneath the singer's trademark hypnotic lull. Distant flurries of churango and mandolin invoke an island string-band breeze in the likes of "Walu (Time)" and "Nhaku Limurr" – the sole Gurrumul original. The gentle weave of a sobbing cello in "Jesu", an elegantly tacking piano in "All God's Children", and low swells of electric guitar on "Baptism" are all pleasing colours on the decorative canvas.

But overall, the key word is familiar. If it weren't for the odd mention of Jesu in the swirling mystery of Yolngu language, anyone acquainted with the Arnhem Land prodigy's first two albums would quite reasonably assume he was singing timeless Gumatj business as usual. Indeed, newcomers will likely feel the Earth move in the depth of his wordless, tightly harmonised humming and comforting three-chord cycles of fingerpicking. But musical evolution is as elusive as changing light in this world, and neither the chunky bush-country guitar licks of "Saviour" nor the soft-rock roll of "Hallelujah" bring the glimmer of new horizons that might have furthered the plot of this remarkable musician's journey.

In the absence of musical innovation, the slightly uncomfortable question *The Gospel Album* raises is whether the phenomenon of Gurrumul is enhanced by his subject matter. When we knew his ethereal voice was speaking of tides and sunsets, ancestors and totems, we heard landscapes of time immemorial; visions of roads never documented before his near-miraculous debut in the world music charts of 2008.

When the vibe goes all "Kumbaya", as it does in the strict-time stomp of "The Sweetest Name" and the sloooow strum and hum of "Riyala (There Is a River)", that precious connection to a land we barely know is short-circuited by something most of the western world knows backwards, and can only find far less remarkable.

In the context of the indigenous Australian story in which Gurrumul stands so tall, a sombre campfire rendition of "Amazing Grace" is food for thought of a pretty stodgy kind. There are resonances here, certainly, that speak to the universal nature of devotion; the sacred subtext of a magnificent voice raised in song of any kind. And neither Gurrumul's sincerity nor his uniqueness as a performer are even slightly in question. For now though, the frontiers of discovery promised by his arrival remain as static as a lovely postcard sunset.

KEY TRACKS: "Nhaku Limurr", "Baptism", "Walu (Time)"



Josh Pyke's New Tricks

Wistful troubadour tries to shake things up on album number five

Josh Pyke

But For All These Shrinking Hearts Wonderlick/Sony ★★ ★



It opens with a low, pulsing rumble. Then there's a build-up of slightly unsettling keyboards. "I've been taking my cues from the Book of Revelations," sings Josh Pyke. Well, actually, he's pretty obviously been taking his cues from Wilco, specifically their career-defining 2002 fractured masterpiece *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*.

He's said as much himself. On two songs – "Songliness" and "Momentary Glow" – he used Jeff Tweedy's trick of recording gibberish before he had any lyrics, then worked with that "mumble track" to finish the final wording. It's a good idea and a bold move for a guy who has built his reputation on four albums of personal, poetic songs that evoke everyone from Paul Simon to Elliott Smith. You'll find a surprising sunshine-pop chorus in "Songliness", and he previously would have never used something like the oscillating keyboard line that threads throughout "There's a Line".

But a romantic troubadour doesn't change his spots overnight and Pyke doesn't give himself over completely enough to new working methods. His tendency towards wistful reflection remains, and with his default setting of acoustic guitar and softly-softly multi-tracked vocals, a few of these songs seem interchangeable with his past work. And "Hollerin' Hearts", from the plinking ukulele to the singalong feel, seems like an attempt to swim in the slipstream of Vance Joy's "Riptide".

BARRY DIVOLA



Holy Holy

When the Storms Would Come Sony/Wonderlick ★★ ★ ½

Globe-straddling duo release their debut album

"Sentimental and Monday"; "Wanderer"; "Pretty Strays for Hopeless Lovers". They're song titles that conjure dusty roads, hangovers, heavy hearts and hazy horizons, and Timothy Carroll and Oscar Dawson, frontman and guitarist respectively, make convincing itinerant romantics. They first convened in South-East Asia, and then Stockholm, after all; it's little wonder their seductive psych-folk-rock debut sounds more European than Australian. In Carroll's pastoral lilt and Matt Redlich's warm production, there's more than a touch of Midlake, too. Dawson provides needed edge, making like David Gilmour with a ripping solo on "You Cannot Call For Love Like a Dog".

ANNABEL ROSS



Pavement

The Secret History Vol. 1 Matador/Remote Control ★★ ★

Slacker icons' early work revisited – again

Before Stephen Malkmus became the poster boy for slacker indie rock, Pavement's earliest material was couched in abstract wordplay and lo-fi harshness. The first in a series of reissued "shadow albums", this 30-track set compiles the band's B-sides and Peel Sessions for 1992's genre-defining *Slanted and Enchanted*, plus an engagingly loose yet fairly forgettable Brixton gig. The only trouble is that all of them were included on 2002's deluxe *Slanted* reissue, which makes their individual release less of an event. But there's still a lot to love, from the charred charisma of "Circa 1762" to the volatile jangle of "My First Mine". This being Pavement, the best tunes feel ad-libbed and gloriously unfinished.

DOUG WALLEN

It's Good For the Soul

Menangle's favourite sons return, with added soul

The Rubens *Hoops*

Ivy League ★★½



While their 2012 self-titled debut and singles "My Gun" and "Lay It Down" launched the Rubens into Australia's indie stratosphere, there was no escaping that, even with its Motown flourishes, the brothers Margin (Sam, Elliott and Zaac) and their compadres Scott Baldwin and Will Zeglis made very serious music.

Hoops is a welcome change; still composed of typically big, grandiose indie rock, this time it's infused with more playful musical theatricality and a relatable perspective. Because while the subject matter behind tunes like "Switchblade" or "Battles" isn't exactly cheery, musically the band are stretching out and maturing – as you'd expect from a second album – upping their soul game and giving these tunes an experienced weightiness. It's realised in the horns of "Hold Me Back", the

KEY TRACKS:

"The Fool", "Cut Me Loose"



organ-led indie funk swagger of "Cut Me Loose" (plus its killer guitar solo) and "Things About To Change", all excellent tunes that veer between sunshine soul, indie pop optimism and painful emotional introspection with an assured aplomb.

Space is also utilised better on *Hoops*; the relaxed chill of the title-track weirdly recalls Kanye's "Can't Tell Me Nothing", while "Bitter End" is icy and piercing – a natural (Chet Faker-evoking) evolution from "My Gun". But the best is latter-day Black Keys-esque closer "The Fool". With *Hoops* the Rubens confirm that they're Australia's go-to for outstanding indie-soul.

JAYMZ CLEMENTS



The Fratellis

Eyes Wide, Tongue Tied

Cooking Vinyl ★★

Football crowds won't be chanting many of these songs

If you judged a band's popularity solely on the number of times one of their songs was chanted en masse by English football fans, then this Glaswegian trio would be one of the biggest groups in the world, courtesy of 2006's "Chelsea Dagger". But they drifted into hiatus in 2009 and album number four finds them running out of steam after the break. The glam-rock stomp of "Baby Don't You Lie To Me" and percolating feel of "Thief" show some signs of life, but they largely forsake the Libertines swagger and Supergrass bounce of yore, content to mark time on mid-paced bluster (or slow-paced bluster in the case of the inventively titled "Slow") as featureless as the blank canvas on the cover.

B.D.



Albert Hammond Jr.

Momentary Masters Liberator

★★★½

Strokes guitarist sobers up and makes his best album yet

At the height of his drug addiction, Albert Hammond Jr. was the one person who could out-party Pete Doherty. But sobriety has finally been embraced by the Strokes guitarist, who once confessed to shooting up 20 times a day. It's sharpened up his songwriting for one, which was scungy and tossed-off on 2008's *¿Cómo Te Llama?* (recorded, like its predecessor, under the influence). Vocally, Hammond sounds like a new man, soaring to unseen heights on the anthemic "Losing Touch". "Born Slippy" (not an Underworld cover) is the hit the Strokes were just crying out for when they made *Angles* in 2011. He ends it all on the peppy "Side Boob", which is not nearly as questionable as its sounds.

DARREN LEVIN



Destroyer

Poison Season POD/Inertia

★★★★

Canadian cult hero is as creative as ever 10 albums in

You've got to hand it to Destroyer mainman Dan Bejar. Even when he's onto a good thing – 2011's *Kaputt* was his most acclaimed outing yet; a soft rock masterpiece inspired by Eighties pop-prog excess – he was always going to light a match to the past. On his 10th album, Bejar has put together his most sprawling opus yet. A string section turns "Hell" into a chamber music dirge; there's a *Kaputt*-esque lushness to "The River"; while the blaring sax at the start of "Dream Lover" sounds like an ironic nod to Bruce Springsteen's "Rosalita". This is not an entry-level Destroyer album like *Kaputt* or *Rubies*. But those who've been with Bejar for the long haul will be enthralled at each odd-ball turn.

D.L.



Tex Perkins & the Dark Horses

Tunnel at the End of the Light Dark Horse

★★★½

Rock wildman still kicking against the pricks – wearily

The third instalment in Tex Perkins' 'landscape trilogy' with the Dark Horses, *Tunnel* is a somnolent sign-off to the languid country rhythms of 2011's self-titled LP and the frayed, world-weary *Everyone's Alone* (2012). "I begin my journey to the end of the day with the kind of reluctance you get at my age," Perkins sings on "Oh Lucky Me". "All Is Quiet" suggests the kids are to blame ("all is quiet, the fuckin' baby's not cryin'...oh, for a sleepin' pill"). It's a hypnotic journey, with brooding piano lines and Gus Agars' percussion work keeping drowsy time throughout. A lengthy grab from *Alien* ("Un Sound") tells us Perkins has fallen asleep with the TV on.

GARETH HIPWELL



Lindi Ortega

Faded Gloryville Cooking Vinyl

★★★½

She's still a little bit country and a little bit rock & roll

The ghost town of Lindi Ortega's fourth album title doesn't find her as down-and-out as it might sound. Beyond the muted heartbreak of "Ashes" and the funeral march of the title track is a comfy halfway point between the Fifties slow dance of "Someday Soon" and the swinging saloon doors of "When You Ain't Home". She's all sprightly heels and toes in the skirt-hoisting "Rundown Neighbourhood" and her glassy trill bounces back hard from the rock & roll slap-echo of "Run Amuck". If there's anything faded about the Canadian cowgirl's latest chapter, it isn't the Bee Gees cover either: a steamy version of "To Love Somebody" that makes pop, soul and country sound like kissing cousins.

MICHAEL DWYER



Years & Years

Communion Polydor

★★★★½

Hyped British band deliver the substance on debut

Crowned the winner of BBC's Sound of 2015, Years & Years have made a promising start to justify the attention. On opener "Foundation", an eerie vocal is pegged against glacial, swirling electronics. Elsewhere, "Shine" is a blissful slice of pop, "Ties" is propelled by a throbbing bassline, and "King" is one of the year's most exciting rave anthems. Although Olly Alexander's soulful vocals are an obvious asset, his over-earnest delivery on a handful of saccharine ballads – especially "Eyes Shut" – is hampered by some seriously dated pop production. For the most part though, the trio master melancholia and euphoria in equal measure, and *Communion* almost lives up to its holy promise. **MICHAEL WILTON**



Frankie & the Heartstrings

Decency Wichita

★★★

Sunderland soul boys keep the pub lock-in stomping

The sound of a lonely guitar twanging over the dog racing on the wireless suspends Frankie Francis in a timeless UK bedsit romance. The atmospheric bookends contain his third album of wiry British soul: guitars begging, horns redeeming, tremulous white-boy yodel throwing skinny arms around every working class lad with a bruised heart of gold. It's plenty stirring in the rising simmer of "Hate Me Like You Used To" and the fragility of "Knife In My Back". Francis's sharp tongue can be fun too: "Your father died and I'm hoping it's hereditary," he spits in "Decency". But the pint-spilling stabs of Friday night exuberance can sound more like filler than revelation. **MICHAEL DWYER**



A Right Royal Return

Sydney punks stretch out on an album that may – or may not – be their last

Royal Headache *High*

Distant and Vague Recordings ★★★★★



Given the sense of volatility that surrounds Royal Headache – from an Opera House stage invasion they unwittingly caused to a live show that could implode at any point – the mere existence of this album is miraculous in itself. Frontman Shogun has always hinted that Royal Headache are a band on borrowed time, recently telling ROLLING STONE that this record was "that one umbilical cord that's kept me connected to the fucking band".

But *High* sounds absolutely nothing like the "contractual obligation" that statement implies. There's a cluster of tracks here that pick up where 2011 debut *Royal Headache* left off, yet there are other moments where you get a sense they're becoming a different band altogether.

There's (gasp!) an organ on "Need You", which sounds like they've recruited the Attractions' Steve Nieve into the fold (it's actually Gabrielle De Giorgio, a friend of the band). There's (gasp!) a ballad that sounds like they're simultaneously paying homage to Guns N' Roses and Cold Chisel ("Carolina"). On "Wouldn't You Know", Shogun plays the role of a squeaky clean Fifties crooner over a swampy riff and yet more organ.

He's as committed to romanticism as he is to his vocal takes. But Royal Headache's great trick is making you believe in a future that's as uncertain as their next move.

KEY TRACKS:
"High", "Wouldn't You Know", "Carolina"

DARREN LEVIN



Mac DeMarco

Another One Spunk

★★★

Canadian crooner's quickfire follow-up to 'Salad Days' LP

Everyone's favourite gap-toothed Canuck has always been able to do goofy. But on last year's *Salad Days* he proved he could so sincere. Almost a year to the day since that LP comes this eight-track mini-album, which is more like a companion piece than a bridging release showcasing new sounds. Mac's not done with *Salad Days'* easy listening palette – close-miked drums, warm keys and feebly guitar – or its bittersweet romanticism. "Another One" finds him still in his dressing gown, paranoid his partner might not love him; while he sounds positively broken on "A Heart Like Hers". When Mac signs off with two minutes of gurgling water and the offer of a cuppa it sounds like he needs a hug. **D.I.**



Owl City

Mobile Orchestra Universal

★★★

Electropop mainstay delivers hits and misses on fifth album

Adam Young's early tracks as Owl City were sonic diary entries, crafted in his parents' Minnesota basement using a laptop and cheap gear. The success of sugary single "Fireflies" in 2009 gave Young a bigger budget to work with, and he's been attempting to diversify his sound ever since. On *Mobile Orchestra*, Young has most success when sticking close to his old formula. Opener "Verge" is rousing and cute, pairing sincere guest vocals from Aloe Blacc with a Nineties club beat and bouncy synth lines; while closer "This Isn't the End" is unabashedly sentimental, with layers of pillowy keyboards. But attempts at country ("Back Home") and modern-day EDM ("Thunderstruck") are less convincing. **DAN F. STAPLETON**

Northlane's New Territory

Local metal favourites hit new peak on multi-faceted third LP

Northlane *Node* UNFD ★★★★★



The departure in 2014 of vocalist Adrian Fitipaldes left Sydney metalcore outfit Northlane in a make-or-break position. Second album *Singularity* had been rapturously received, and successful tours both locally and overseas had proven the group's stamina and technical proficiency. But without the charismatic Fitipaldes at the helm, some questioned the band's ability to maintain their momentum.

Node is a triumphant rebuff to those doubters. It's their most satisfying and coherent release so far: an assured collection that's full of virtuosic playing and tight songcraft. New vocalist Marcus Bridge is remarkably versatile, displaying a deft touch when he screams and delivering nuanced clean vocals. He may not quite match the brute force of Fitipaldes, but he brings a depth of emotion that will catch many listeners off guard.

Northlane teamed once again with producer Will Putney, who has helped the band find a balance between atmosphere and directness. Tracks

KEY TRACKS:

"Rot", "Weightless", "Obelisk"



like opener "Soma" combine ominous intros and pummelling verses with feather-light bridges to disorienting and genuinely thrilling effect. The lengthy "Weightless" builds effortlessly from a single echoing guitar line to a widescreen vocal climax, demonstrating the group's newfound mastery of dynamics.

The showiness that occasionally made Northlane sound gimmicky has been replaced with subtlety that rewards repeated listens. *Node* pushes metalcore in unexpected, progressive directions, and it does so with grace. **D.F.S.**



Bullet For My Valentine

Venom RCA

★★★★★

Fierce, focused return from revitalised Welsh metal quartet

BFMV may have scored their third Top 5 ARIA chart placing with 2013's *Temper Temper*, but its raunchy, rock & roll vibe felt contrived and misjudged, discomfiting long-time fans who view them as the heirs apparent to Metallica's throne. A throwback to their Megadeth/Maiden-inspired origins, *Venom* should present no such problems. Though it's difficult not to read the album title as an attempt to position LP number five in the direct lineage of acclaimed 2005 debut *The Poison*, Matt Tuck's band have never sounded quite as forceful or self-assured as they do here on state-of-the-art bangers "Worthless" and "Venom". Their ascendancy into metal's premier division begins now. **PAUL BRANNIGAN**



Family Fold

Lustre Glo Ind.

★★★★½

Former Lazy Susan frontman returns with a slab of cheery pop

Known chiefly as former frontman for Triple J favourites Lazy Susan, Paul Andrews has returned with a project perhaps destined to relegate the Susans to little more than a musical memory (no offence intended, of course). *Lustre Glo*, Andrews' debut under the Family Fold moniker, shines in its own warm, melodic and genre-hopping right. Essentially a pop album, it's a release that bursts with myriad tastes and sounds, from the jangling guitar pop of opener "Get a Grip Upon Yourself" to the more intricate "New Friends". Along for the ride are N'Awlins-esque horns and Americana-inspired vocal harmonies with Sarah Humphreys, amongst others. This heralds more stuff to come from Andrews. **SAMUEL J. FELL**



The Jungle Giants

Speakerzoid Amplifire

★★★★★

Brisbane band evolve into something special on second LP

Often bands mistake creativity and evolution for lazily resorting to synths, but the Jungle Giants have built from the by-the-numbers indie of 2013's *Learn to Exist* to craft *Speakerzoid*, a dazzling, inventive and beguilingly strange second LP. Bursts of unexpected instrumentation (flute, cowbell, wood percussion, recorder) and samples nestle nicely within songs that are anything but predictable; shades of Beck and Gorillaz lie on "Not Bad" and "Kooky Eyes", while Cornelius weighs heavily on "It Gets Better". With their usage of tempo (the slinky indie pop of "Creepy Cool" and "What Do You Think") *Speakerzoid* is a restless beast, keeping you on your toes throughout. An excellent, eminently rewarding surprise. **JAYMZ CLEMENTS**



Gardens & Villa

Music For Dogs Inertia

★★★★★

Californian pair return with most potent offering yet

Gardens & Villa's second album, *Dunes* (2014), was charming but scattered – torn between finely crafted synth-pop and more sprawling, ambient sound-swathes. This is firmly in the former camp, and is a revelation. Chris Lynch and Adam Rasmussen can be seen as the thinking man's MGMT, with the undeniable catchiness of their electronic indie given added dimension by left-field production turns and a diversity of rhythms that hint at Todd Rundgren, along with the lingering LCD Soundsystem influence, strongest here on the super "Maximize Results". The sound of a band reaching its potential, *Music For Dogs* is fascinating in its textures and instrumentation, yet infectious on a visceral level. **BARNABY SMITH**



Joss Stone

Water For Your Soul Stone'd

★★★★½

Soul songstress explores the wonder of herb, and reggae

A reggae-tinged set of songs would seem the least likely option for 28-year-old Brit Joss Stone, but those who revel in the unexpected will find much to enjoy here. That's not to say that her not-so-secret weapon of a voice, soulful and sultry, isn't front and centre, but the musical backdrop for Stone's seventh LP is more Kingston, Jamaica than Muscle Shoals, Alabama. "The Answer" is a co-write with reggae star Dennis Bovell; Damian Marley, who Stone recently jammed with as part of uber-group Superheavy, also contributes. *Water For Your Soul* runs about three tracks too long, but this deeply chilled set even includes an introduction to the wonders of sensimilla. What else do you need? **JEFF APTER**



New Gum Sarn

New Gold Mountain Spunk

★ ★ ½

Kiwi band too fond of unfocused wanderings

Auckland quartet New Gum Sarn love tugging loose and chasing a variety of guitar threads, but they seldom lead anywhere meaningful. Lead single “Money Talks” has a lot of grabby potential yet reels off into unfocused sprawl, and this debut album follows suit. Instrumental opener “Anxiety Nap” nods to both Modest Mouse and Slint, getting better as more layers materialise, while “Panic in the Treasure Trove” echoes jumbled African guitar licks. Other songs wander aimlessly, even when Oscar Dowling’s quivering vocals rise to the fore. Too short and too lackadaisical alike, *New Gold Mountain* swaps between a handful of promising modes but doesn’t commit to any long enough for them to stick. **D.W.**



Carly Rae Jepsen

E-MO-TION Universal

★ ★ ★

Tween fave shows signs of maturity

At 29, Carly Rae Jepsen is still young, but nearly two decades older than her largely tween audience, which puts the singer in a difficult position as she contemplates life after “Call Me Maybe”. *E-MO-TION* sees Jepsen stuck between pandering to young fans and presenting a more mature self; on “Boy Problems” and “I Really Like You” she’s fizzy and girlish, on incandescent wallflower ballad “All That” she’s graduated to the prom and on “Warm Blood” she’s all woman. Either way, it mostly works; a huge A-team of writers (Ariel Rechtshaid, Dev Hynes, Sia, Greg Kurstin et al) have helped Jepsen pen a fine collection of songs that suggest she’s ready to play with the big girls. **ANNABEL ROSS**

The Calm After the Storm

Moody post-divorce record from doyen of Aussie country

Shane Nicholson *Hell Breaks Loose*

Lost Highway ★ ★ ★ ★



Shane Nicholson’s fifth solo album marks a kind of catharsis for an artist now something of a veteran among Australia’s alt-country community. Not only is this his first LP since his well-documented divorce from Kasey Chambers in 2013, he also had to confront a case of songwriter’s block, overcome by an inspiring trip to Central Australia. Not that there is much sense of that locale or culture on the unhurried, introspective *Hell Breaks Loose*, which sits back without pretension or much complexity, making for a disarmingly interesting listen.

Nicholson is never likely to reinvent the genre, yet this is far from formulaic country-rock. An array of sombre ballads (aided by some very pleasant piano parts) is balanced by more dynamic songs such as the Jayhawks-esque “When The Money’s Gone”. Another highlight is an impressive example of Nicholson’s melodic gifts, the rather Gene Clark-like “You And Whose Army”.

Nicholson’s lyrics, which address his split from Chambers on “Single Fathers” and with some feeling on “Weight of the World”, are more direct than poetic, while one of his great strengths, that of economy, is sustained here with few songs exceeding three minutes, an almost punk-like insistence on not overindulging an idea. It makes for a sharp, precise record in both music and message that stands alongside his best work.

KEY TRACKS:

“When the Money’s Gone”, “Single Fathers”

BARNABY SMITH



Mas Ysa

Seraph Downtown/Create/Control

★ ★ ★ ★

Oberlin grad issues emotive electronic salvo

The debut LP from Brooklyn-based Quebecois Thomas Arsenault lands with an arresting synth drone and so much confidence. Mixed by Damian Taylor (Björk), *Seraph* wrings mood from recycled, outmoded sounds. Punchy drum programming cuts through the retro-shtick of “Margarita”, while “Suffer” champions frenetic keys and Asiatic flute effects. There’s a dance banger (“Look Up”), choppy techno (“Service”), and even an acoustic weeper (“Don’t Make”). Vocally, Arsenault is best when articulating genuine vulnerability (“Arrows”), and a delicate back-and-forth with Nicole Miglis of Hundred Waters (“Gun”). *Seraph* is a study in forging beauty and feeling from sounds otherwise discarded or forgotten. **G.H.**



Health

Death Magic Caroline Australia

★ ★

Danceable noise-rockers clean up too much

Health made their name with brash electronic noise before branching out with well-curated remix albums and moody video-game soundtracks. Their third LP moves further into accessibility, pairing Liars and NIN nods with echoes of Depeche Mode (“Stonefist”) and the Postal Service (“Drugs Exist”). While “Men Today” recalls their past industrial-meets-grind ferocity, “Flesh World (UK)” is the limpest of club pop. Besides ditching the vivid harshness that saturated 2009’s *Get Color*, Health’s makeover casts new light on unfortunate lyrics like “Life is strange/We die and we don’t know why.” There are scattered flashes of volatility, but mostly it’s tragically bland. **DOUG WALLEN**

Awakening the Senses

Brisbane's progressive hard rockers make a complex third statement

Dead Letter Circus *Aesthesis*

UNFD ★★★★★



It's fair to say that no other single released by a Top 5 act in Australia this year will feature lyrics such as "Your apathy puts your hand on the blade of the mother slain" ("While You Wait"). That Dead Letter Circus can deliver such a line and make it as catchy as a nursery rhyme is a talent in itself, albeit a very subversive one; the art of getting you to think about the world and your place in it without actually knowing you're doing it. For three albums now, the Brisbane quintet have raged against the machine of apathy and the tyranny of fearmongering and ignorance, but they've never done it with the same kind of restraint they demonstrate on *Aesthesis*. Not that it's a mellow album, but after a stint in the U.S. in 2013 touring pre-

KEY TRACKS:

"While You Wait", "X", "Born (Part 2)"



dominantly with metal bands they returned to Australia determined to make an album that would never again have them mistaken for an act of that genre.

The result is a record concerned as much with atmospherics as it is big riffs, that conceals its hooks, saving them for deeper listens. And so while lyrically vocalist Kim Benzie may sometimes wield a blunt hammer ("Put your faith in fear and alarm", he sings in "The Burning Number"; "One more lie/Will we swallow it?" he asks in "Show Me"), musically *Aesthesis* is an album of complexity and space.

SIMON JONES



Fly Golden Eagle

Quartz Bijou

ATO ★★★★★

Nashville psych outfit cover the spread

A 'selection' of prime cuts from 26-track megalith *Quartz* (2014), *Quartz Bijou* was produced in part by retro-specialist Andrija Tokic. Where *Swagger* (2011) spun a miasmic, funk-inflected cloud, *Quartz Bijou* shows up psych for the grab-bag of sound and influence it is. Keys player Mitch Jones apes Ray Manzarek, while Ben Trimble carries it all off with his reedy but enthusiastic vocals ("Stepping Stone"). Separating themselves from Nashville peers All Them Witches and JEFF the Brotherhood, FGE delve into funk and soul ("You Look Good to Me"), dog T. Rex ("Horse's Mouth"), and offer up slabs of the West Coast ("Boychild Ghost"). Never revelatory, *Quartz Bijou* is plenty varied.

GARETH HIPWELL



Caulfield

Outcast Halfcut Records

★★★★★

Hardcore quintet craft their sophomore album

After spending the better part of the last five years on the road, Caulfield took time out to create *Outcast*. Fans of the Sydney natives' brand of melodic hardcore will not be disappointed. Transitioning seamlessly from throaty growls to clean vocals, tracks such as "Blind Faith" and "Smoke and Mirrors" showcase the band's ability to fuse the two ends of the sonic spectrum. They hardly reinvent the hardcore wheel, though, Caulfield's perfectly timed breakdowns and technical guitar riffs rarely deviating from the genre's standard formula. This makes for uncomplicated listening though, and priding themselves on their touring prowess, promises to translate even better on stage. SALLY MCMULLEN



Flying Saucer Attack

Instrumentals 2015 Domino

★★★★★

Bristol noisenik thrills with first album in 15 years

Nineties noise rock was, fundamentally, reactionary. Unsurprisingly, the recent Britpop revival seems to have drawn some long-dormant antagonists out of the woodwork. First there was m b v (2013), now it's David Pearce's turn. *Instrumentals* 2015 finds the cultish figure alone with a guitar – gone are the folk-inspired vocal lines of seminal debut *Flying Saucer Attack* (1993). Instead, *Instrumentals* boasts 15 carefully-ordered tone poems comprising familiar but implacable drones, capes and effects. Still doggedly analogue, Pearce recorded *Instrumentals* direct to tape/CDR. Given the resurgence of the DIY eight-track ethos, he's late to his own party – but the result is as striking as ever. G.H.



Frank Carter & the Rattlesnakes

Blossom International Death Cult

★★★★★

Ex-Gallows frontman rages again with the help of new outfit

"You're a useless fucking cunt/you are nothing to me," intones Frank Carter on "I Hate You", the closing track on the Rattlesnakes' furious debut. Keep in mind this is the same man who, no less than two years ago, purred "I'm so sick of singing about hate/it's never gonna make a change" with his first post-Gallows outfit, Pure Love. Whatever it is that's seen Carter give in to his devils once more ("Devil Inside Me" documents his torment in detail), fans of his fury will be – as austere as it sounds – glad for it. Because *Blossom* sees the Londoner bottle his rage, set it on fire and throw it, with intent, at your face. Brutal, candid and cathartic. OLIVER PELLING



The Maccabees

Marks to Prove It

Caroline Australia ★★★★★

London indie upstarts hit their stride on fourth album

Realising potential instead of simply having it is tough. Scuttling their middling indie rock for the electronic flourishes of 2012's *Given to the Wild* was smart, but the Maccabees also forgot to write songs to back it up. *Marks To Prove It* remedies that. From the title-track – an immediate and ballsy statement-of-intent – to the gentle croon of "Slow Sun" and "WW1 Portraits" through the cascading melodies of "Something Like Happiness", the Maccabees have married their indie nous with tunes that actually showcase it. Despite occasional forays into beige Arcade Fire kitchen sink-isms ("Kamakura", "Silence"), this is expansive indie rock done without pretension. JAYMZ CLEMENTS



The Basics

The Age Of Entitlement

The Three Basics ★★½

Love, politics and party power from that band with Gotye in it

The Basics understand both kinds of heartbreak. There's the kind where big business poisons a world with no time for refugees or "basic human fucking rights". And there's the kind where your baby's done left you. Neither is any match for the pub-rockin' power of the Melbourne trio's first studio LP in six years, from Kris Schroeder's finger-pointing "Time Poor" to Wally De Backer's hell-for-leather love-lost-in-traffic metaphor in "Roundabout". Third man Tim Heath completes an outfit whose snap-lock chemistry is never less than gripping in a range of styles – agit-folk in "Whatever Happened to the Working Class"; Afro-pop in "Tunomba Saidia" – which is either their secret weapon or their undoing. **MICHAEL DWYER**



Ghost

Meliora Caroline Australia

★★★★

Third "sacred psalm" sees Ghost fortifying their sound

Sweden's Ghost have forged their own genre: pulpit metal. Adored by Phil Anselmo and Dave Grohl alike, thematically *Meliora* explores our pre-apocalyptic condition. Diverse in pace, opener "Spirit" soars, driven by an energetic doomsday musing. A decelerated approach means individual tracks can be contemplated, like "He Is", an expansive ode to The [Satanic] Master. Throughout, Ghost's old school musicianship is affirmed, as riffs bow to the masters, Metallica. Finale "Deus In Absentia" arrives swathed in gorgeous melody and choral accompaniment. Like the swinging of vocalist Papa Emeritus III's censer on-stage, *Meliora* is hypnotic and summons close attention. **R.D.**

REISSUES



The Angels' Commercial Peak

Legendary Oz rockers started a new decade with the most successful album of their career

The Angels Beyond Salvation Deluxe Edition

Liberation ★★★★★



By the time the Angels relocated to Memphis in 1989 to make their ninth studio album, their influence could be heard in acts such as Guns N'Roses – soon to be the biggest rock band in the world, and whose manager, Alan Niven, briefly managed the Angels during this phase – but their success in Australia was yet to be replicated Stateside. *Beyond Salvation* was designed to change that. Gone were the art school pretensions of Doc Neeson's lyrics, and in their place were songs such as "Back Street Pick Up" ("Queen of the night, you got a heart of stone/Now you're back I can't leave you alone"), aimed at seizing the over-sexed zeitgeist of the then-exploding L.A. hard rock scene. Gone too was founding guitarist John Brewster, replaced by former Skyhooks six-stringer Bob Spencer. The resulting LP was bluesier and more polished than previous efforts, and though it didn't break through in America, it was the band's first and only Number One at home. Twenty five years on it is very much a product of its time, though it sounds remarkably fresh due, in part, to a remastering spit'n'polish by original producer Terry Manning. Two discs of extras (U.S. versions, remixes, 12-inch mixes; an 11-song live set) are good, but some more thorough liner notes from those involved would have been a worthy inclusion. **ROD YATES**

The Weed Still Smells Fresh

Tumbleweed Galactaphonic: 20th Anniversary Super-Galactaphonic Edition ★★★★★ Universal



In 1992, Wollongong's Tumbleweed kick-started an Aussie love affair with fuzzed-out stoner-rock with their groundbreaking debut. Twenty years on, their breakthrough second album *Galactaphonic* sounds less like the super-fuzzed dirge we think of as stoner rock now, and more like the hook-driven nod to Detroit garage and surf rock it was probably intended to be. Comes loaded with an inspired second disc of B-sides and live tracks. **MATT COYTE**



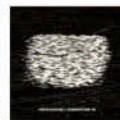
Buried In Verona

Vultures Above, Lions Below

UNFD ★★★★★

Sydney metal mob pay tribute to their troublesome past

After losing members and labouring through limbo, the core of Buried in Verona have reunited to create their fifth studio album. Written and recorded independently, the new tunes are a simultaneous nod to the band's tumultuous past and the promise of an uncharted future. Laments of loss and revenge are embodied in tracks such as "Extraction" and the melodic plea "Extract me, get me out, I'm sick of the ghosts that are dragging me down". It's not all bitching and moaning though, with the feral guitar riffs in "Done For Good" and anthemic chants of "you fucking make me sick" in "Separation" proving that sometimes an album bursting with bangers is the best form of revenge. **SALLY MCMULLEN**



Vince Staples

Summertime '06

Def Jam/ARTium ★★★★★

Cali rapper paints a dark, painful portrait of his hometown

The debut full-length from 22-year-old Vince Staples is an ambitious double album that sketches a vivid picture of Long Beach worthy of director John Singleton – bodies in the alley, ignored eviction notices and the "deadly game of tag" from his days as a teenage gangbanger. Staples flows effortlessly, suggesting a capable understudy of Kendrick Lamar or Earl Sweatshirt ("This shit ain't Gryffindor/We really killing, kicking doors," he raps on "Lift Me Up"). But the music itself, executive-produced by No I.D., leans mostly on harder, darker sounds built from rare psychedelic samples. It adds up to a hard-hitting 20-track portrait of life and love in a mad city. **CHRISTOPHER R. WEINGARTEN**



Iron and Wine and Ben Bridwell

Sing Into My Mouth

Black Cricket/Brown

★★★

Indie buds get together for an adventurous album of covers

On this set of far-flung covers, Sam Beam (a.k.a. indie folk act Iron and Wine) and Ben Bridwell of indie rockers Band of Horses tackle everything from Talking Heads' "This Must Be the Place" to Spiritualized and early-Nineties Sade. Bridwell renders a perfectly gentle vocal on David Gilmour's "There's No Way Out of Here", cleverly landing closer to the 1976 version by prog-pop footnote Unicorn, and a versatile backing band featuring members of Calexico helps elevate tracks like the soul obscurity "Am I a Good Man?". The album ends up feeling like a mixtape put together by a pair of old friends.

CORINNE CUMMINGS



Antonie Tonnon

Successor Flippin' Yeah Industries

★★★★½

New Zealand troubadour delivers grower with solo debut

Already acclaimed in his home country, Anthonie Tonnon's debut solo album is something of a mixed bag. Sonically it ranges from sweeping, layered guitar rock ("Water Underground") to vocal and piano introspection ("The Songs Of Your Youth", replete with swelling vocal harmonies) to the almost electronica of "Railway Lines". You're not quite sure what you'll get next. And yet it comes together nicely because of Tonnon's voice and lyrics. For this is where the focus of *Successor* lies – written almost entirely in the second person, these songs tell tales of life, as normal as anyone would experience, all delivered with no frills. Definitely a grower, something new to find with every listen. SAMUEL J. FELL



Failure

The Heart Is a Monster

INGrooves ★★★★★½

Obscure Nineties alt-rockers prove they deserve their cult

Since their breakup in the late Nineties, Clinton-era alt-rockers Failure have gone from overlooked coulda-beens to cult heroes, numbering Tool and Paramore among their admirers. The band's first album in 19 years justifies their rep. Spacey and sprawling yet packing plenty of guitar muscle, *The Heart Is a Monster* picks up where 1996's *Fantastic Planet* left off (literally: Both albums contain several numbered "Segue" tracks). It also dives deeper into classic influences like Pink Floyd, the Beach Boys and the Beatles, particularly on the wistful ballad "Mulholland Dr". As a result, what might've been a simple Nineties nostalgia trip feels more like history made new.

BRANDON GEIST



Ryn Weaver

The Fool

Mad Love/Interscope

★★★★

A pop eccentric makes her debut after a viral 2014 hit

Last year, 22-year-old Ryn Weaver broke through to online stardom with "OctaHate" – a supercatchy yet left-of-centre pop jewel that drew on the Top 40 flash of Benny Blanco and the indie leanings of Passion Pit's Michael Angelakos, both co-producers on the track. The California-born artist's full-length debut revels in the same eclectic sensibility on warped, sparkling tunes like the title track and "Stay Low". Elsewhere, on the sleepy ballad "New Constellations", she channels her inner Mumford to less exciting results. The biggest highlights on *The Fool* ("Here Is Home") balance both of those instincts, tempering folky ache with subtle, twinkly beats. JILLIAN MAPES

BOOKS

Back To the Wild Frontier

Gudinski: The Godfather Of Australian Rock'N'Roll

Stuart Coupe

Hachette ★★★★★



As far as anecdotes go, Stuart Coupe's unauthorised biography of one of Australian music's biggest players starts with a doozy:

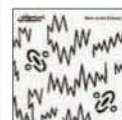
the cancellation of last year's Rolling Stones concert. The author – a longtime journalist and former manager of the Hoodoo Gurus and Paul Kelly – vividly recreates the behind-the-scenes machinations as Frontier Touring founder Michael Gudinski rallies to save the tour in the wake of the death of Mick Jagger's girlfriend, L'Wren Scott. It whets the appetite for a book that, you hope, will be full of such tails, and to an extent it delivers, particularly during its second half as the author dedicates a chapter each to some of the acts with whom his subject has shared a long relationship: Jimmy Barnes, Kylie Minogue, Paul Kelly and Split Enz, among others.



PARTY BOYS
Michael Gudinski signed Jimmy Barnes after Cold Chisel broke up.

The details of record deals, victories and losses are where the book really comes to life, and it's likely that for many music fans these sections will resonate most, as some of the details around Gudinski's formidable empire building – founding Mushroom Records and its myriad offshoots, his first forays into touring and management – whiz by in a blur of names and events. Coupe is reverential towards his subject and, you sense, there are juicier stories still to be told. But as a guide to the life of a true titan of the music industry it's as colourful as its subject.

WILLIAM HARRIS



The Chemical Brothers

Born in the Echoes Astralwerks

★★★★

Nineties party starters rave on with St. Vincent and Beck

The Chemical Brothers are Bill Clinton to Skrillex's Barack Obama – the genius Nineties triangulators who proved dance music could rock blocks without diluting its techno soul. The latest from the U.K. duo hits harder and lower than their last album, 2010's *Further*, with guest-vocal turns from artists as varied as Q-Tip and St. Vincent over tracks that could've torched an outdoor rave in 1995. "I'll See You There" is a "Tomorrow Never Knows"-style psych-funk extravaganza, and "Wide Open" gracefully ends the album with Beck blissing out over the kind of superchill loveliness that's another Chems trademark. They've got the whole world in their beats. JON DOLAN



Buddy Guy

Born To Play Guitar Sony

★★★★

Blues legend still going strong after more than 50 years

Buddy Guy's career has spanned more than half a century, he's released scores of records, won a stack of awards; he's the last of the 'old' blues guys, and as his new cut attests, time has dulled nothing. Perhaps the most aptly titled record this year, Guy is in vintage form, his guitar as incendiary as ever, his voice solid and strong. A handful of guests grace this deep and surprisingly heavy, for the most part, blues romp, including Billy Gibbons and Joss Stone. The LP closes with two tracks, tributes to fellow legends BB King and Muddy Waters, the former featuring a duet with Van Morrison. This is pure Windy City blues, performed with as much passion and skill as Guy has ever committed to tape. **SAMUEL J. FELL**



Frank Turner

Positive Songs For Negative People Universal

★★★★

Stirring sixth album from English singer-songwriter

British troubadour (and former frontman for hardcore outfit Million Dead) Frank Turner has, in the past, always been at his most affecting in solo mode, backed with nothing more than an acoustic guitar. The power he can summon with his words and a six-string is evident in album closer "Song For Josh", a genuinely heartbreaking tribute to the 9:30 Club's Josh Burdette, who killed himself in 2013. Elsewhere, though, Turner harnesses the power of a band better than ever before – see the rousing "Josephine", the everyman sentiment of "Love Forty Down" and the piano-led refrain of "Mittens", songs which match Turner's way with words with melodies that stick for days. **ROD YATES**



A Cosmic Soul Queen Finds Her Sound

Prince collaborator Lianne La Havas' bass-heavy grooves recall vintage Aretha Franklin

Lianne La Havas *Blood* Nonesuch ★★★★★½



When we first met Lianne La Havas, on her 2012 debut, she was a South London 22-year-old coming of age, electric guitar in hand. Plucking out rhythm lines that sounded like bossa nova gone rockabilly, she sang about love's ups and downs in a voice that moved from gold to gravel in a blink, intertwining strength and vulnerability. On her second album, she still strums and fingerpicks like an alt-folkie, but that new sound you hear is bass, and plenty of it. Standouts like "Unstoppable" and "What You Don't Do" make the case for La Havas as a cosmic soul queen, recalling the daydream music Aretha Franklin made in the mid-Seventies. Many will attribute the change to Prince – La Havas performed with him on his last album and on *SNL* – but for all the low end, these grooves are almost untouched by funk. Her music remains her own; when she sings, "All I've ever known is how to be alone" on "Tokyo", she's contemplating her independence as much as lamenting her solitude. It doesn't all work (see the mushy "Midnight"). But when it comes together – as on the bumping ode to Jamaica "Green & Gold", and the spare "Wonderful" – this album demands, and rewards, all the attention you can give it. **JOE LEVY**

KEY TRACKS:
"Wonderful",
"Unstoppable"



Various Artists

When Sharpies Ruled: a Vicious Selection Festival/Warner

★★★★

Killer postcard from a wild decade of Oz rock

Named for the sharp-dressed youths who ran amuck in the 1970s, this lavishly packaged compilation bottles a high-impact musical era defined by serrated riffs, monster chops, swaggering vocals, and a free-wheeling party vibe. The 23 tracks span '73 to '79, with the action moving from bluesy batlers to Skyhooks-style glam brats and snide proto-punks. There's a lot of cheeky flamboyance on display – the La De Das' fuzzed-out "The Place" is an early highlight, and the usual suspects show up in due course: Coloured Balls, Skyhooks, the Aztecs, Rose Tattoo etc. Even better are lesser-known gems like the spiky New Wave of La Femme's "Chelsea Kids". **D.W.**



Bad//Dreems

Dogs at Bay Ivy League

★★★★½

Aussie pub rock revitalised with big 'tude and big tunes

Adelaide quartet Bad//Dreems call themselves 'outsider rock', but in 2015 that simply means they're not a band that hide behind feedback and play while staring at their shoes. Instead, this is anthemic, in-your-face Eighties-style pub rock with stadium-sized production from Mark Opitz (AC/DC, Cold Chisel, INXS). It's unashamedly working class and refreshingly free from cultural cringe, singer Ben Marwe a wry commentator on everything from macho posturing to failed relationships (and sounding none-more-Aussie with a perfectly timed "piss off" on radio hit "Dumb Ideas"). It's an assured debut from a band still finding their feet, crammed with big choruses and an even bigger attitude. **JAMES JENNINGS**

The Waifs' 'Beautiful' Return

Grown-up folk darlings reunite for their contemplative seventh album

The Waifs *Beautiful You* Jarrah ★★☆☆



It's 20 years now since folk trio the Waifs used a Kombi van to travel to early gigs around Australia. These days, the band are leading all but separate lives – Donna Simpson

has recently returned to Western Australia after eight years in Minneapolis, sister Vikki Thorn lives in Utah, and Josh Cunningham splits his time between California and New South Wales – and their albums are less frequent than during their prolific period in the late Nineties. But theirs is a camaraderie forged in fire, and when the band members do reconvene, as they did this January in Byron Bay's 301 studios with producer Nick DiDia (Bruce Springsteen, Powderfinger, Pearl Jam), the songs tumble out with ease, and the reflection that maturity begets. Thorn reconnects with the family home in Albany, WA, in wistful opener "Black Dirt Track", and considers the distance between homes new and old in "6000 miles", her cracked vocals overcoming cliché – "not even oceans could come between us" – (just).

KEY TRACKS:

"Black Dirt Track", "Beautiful You"



Born-again Christian Cunningham turns a car breakdown into an examination of humanity on the earnest "Dark Highway" (it's at least melodic, and preferable to his dirgey "Cracks of Dawn"), and on the title track Simpson reaches out to a friend struggling with addiction – a battle with which Simpson is familiar, addressed on 2011's *Temptation*. The bluesy "Rowena & Wallace", on which Cunningham's quicksilver riffing duels with Thorn's fervent harmonica, adds welcome edge, but this is a mellow celebration of endurance above all else. **ANNABEL ROSS**



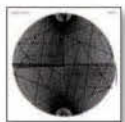
Fear Factory

Genexus Nuclear Blast

★★★★½

Album nine continues man vs. machine theme

Fear Factory have been making sci-fi projections for 26 years. *Genexus* envisages a future where human and machine are indistinguishable. Early conflict is mirrored in "Soul Hacker", as Burton C. Bell barks his protest at psyche theft; similarly, "Protomech" bears FF's industrial metal style. Finale "Expiration Date" is a triumph. The machines' struggle with the human concept of death is told via eerie melody. Co-producer Rhys Fulmer employs sparse keyboard samples, while Dino Cazares' jackhammer riffs have been silenced. For a band whose longevity has been threatened by personnel changes and ex-member lawsuits, the cohesion and might of *Genexus* ratifies their raison d'être. **ROBYN DOREIAN**



Deaf Wish

Pain Sub Pop

★★★★½

Melbourne band's blistering, ball-tearing punk rock

One of the most aptly named bands around, Melbourne four-piece Deaf Wish offer up 30 minutes of ferocious, dissonant punk rock on their debut LP for Sub Pop. From the repeated opening note of "The Whip" through to the hoarse refrain of the title track and the slower but still squall-heavy closer "Calypso", this is No Wave at its most we-don't-give-a-fuck; an ADHD Sonic Youth with anger issues. Each member takes a turn on vocals, but the sound is consistent: frustrated and fucked-off until the bitter end, until a vague sense of regret about the 25-minute outburst that preceded it seeps in on "Calypso": "Sometimes my life turns to noise, so I pray for peace." Hopefully it doesn't come too soon. **J.J.**



Sublime With Rome

Sirens BMG/Chrysalis

★★★★½

Reconstituted Nineties beach bros jam on into a new groove

Sublime's charismatic front-man, Brad Nowell, died just months before their 1996 major-label debut became a smash hit. The surviving members of the SoCal crew re-formed a few years back with new guy Rome Ramirez in Nowell's place, but bassist Eric Wilson is the only original member left on the group's latest LP, which stirs up the same hey-whatever mix of reggae, hip-hop and punk that made Sublime shirtless charmers 20 years ago. Ramirez sings about peace, love and his dick with a smooth versatility that matches the buoyant music. But without anything like Nowell's sarcastic slacker edge, Ramirez comes off as not much more than a good-natured party dude. **JOHN DOLAN**



Full Tote Odds

The Chosen Few Ind.

★★★★½

Odds are this will put the local crew on a wider radar than ever

While not quite as expansive as other Adelaide heroes, after 15 years in the game, Full Tote Odds' second album is emphatic in its own right, focusing on issues like bullying, mental illness and empowerment, while remaining an upbeat, positive celebration of hip-hop. Knowing how lucky they are to be able to get their message out, at various times FTO call on horns, keys, acoustic guitar, sweet vocal lines, intense scratching and recognisable samples to make a chilled-while-hectic mesh worthy of guests like Purpose and Prime ("You Don't Know"). Like they spit on "Think About Me", backed by Simplex of Terra Firma, "You'll never find a level that we'll ever be on, even if you had a catalogue of incredible songs!" **LUKE ANISIMOFF**



Moses Gunn Collective

Mercy Mountain Create/Control

★★★★

Brisbane freakniks throw the psychedelic party of the year

God knows what they're putting in the water in Brisbane. Moses Gunn Collective, a psych-pop quintet from the Sunshine State, have put on record the kind of loose, insanely fun party you don't want to miss – one where you wake up in a pile of glitter and with a membership to a freshly formed cult. There's a sweet spot between spontaneous jams and uplifting, expertly crafted pop that the band regularly hit, the trip only coming back to Earth for sombre closer "Neighbourhood", a melancholy lament on suburban malaise – until, half-way through, it takes off for the stars again, the brief check-in with reality a reminder that sometimes it's better to just lose yourself in a day-glo dream. **J.J.**

BLACK COMEDY
Emma Stone's Jill
falls for Joaquin
Phoenix's Abe
in *Irrational Man*



Murder Was the Case

Woody Allen revisits some familiar themes in suspenseful mind-teaser **By Peter Travers**

Irrational Man

Joaquin Phoenix, Emma Stone, Parker Posey

Directed by Woody Allen

★★★★½

GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER in a godless universe is a theme that has long compelled Woody Allen, from *Crimes and Misdemeanors* to *Match Point*. Allen sees this as a cosmic joke. And in *Irrational Man*, the story of an impotent, alcoholic philosophy professor (Joaquin Phoenix) who tries to rationalise homicide, Allen serves the comedy black and stinging hot.

Phoenix plays Abe Lucas, an educator who hates himself for leaving real-world activism in Darfur and New Orleans to teach a summer course in ethical strategies at Braylin, a fictional college in Rhode Island. The students romanticise Abe, especially Jill Pollard (Emma Stone), who finds her boyfriend, Roy (Jamie Blackley), palling in comparison. Abe has a similar effect on Rita Richards (a slyly quirky Parker Posey), an unhappy faculty wife.

Alas, Abe can't get it up, not until he and Jill overhear a conversation in a diner that involves a woman suffering a grave injustice. In a switch that owes as much to Hitchcock as to the great philosophers, Abe considers a crime of justice, not passion, to which he can't be connected by motive.

To avoid spoilers, let me say that Allen has crafted a suspenseful mind-teaser that might feel too much like an intellectual exercise if Phoenix and Stone didn't infuse it with raw humanity. The conceptual bubble Allen creates in *Irrational Man* is potent provocation built to keep you up nights.

Trainwreck

Amy Schumer, Bill Hader

Directed by Judd Apatow

★★★★★

AMY SCHUMER MAKES YOU laugh till it hurts. Proof is in her Comedy Central series, *Inside Amy Schumer*, with its classic skits on Bill Cosby and whether Schumer is hot enough for TV. Proof positive is in her starring

movie debut in *Trainwreck*. In the lead role and as screenwriter – with director Judd Apatow expertly harnessing her energy, not taming it – Schumer is a whole summer of comic fireworks wrapped in one ballsy package. Or is that sexist? Heads up, guys. Schumer's assault on cave-man attitudes hits like a kick in the nut sack.

She plays Amy Townsend, a writer for a men's magazine run by an editor (a roilingly funny Tilda Swinton) fond of headlines like ARE YOU GAY OR IS SHE JUST BORING? Amy is sent to interview Aaron Connors (Bill Hader), a sports-medicine doc-

tor who tends the celeb likes of LeBron James (spoofing himself) and Amar'e Stoudemire.

The stage is set for love. But wait. Amy, with a mouth fuelled by booze, weed and a neglectful dad (a tangy Colin Quinn), will usually do a guy and dump him. Aaron is less of a dude, though the excellent Hader, whose skill as an actor hits a new peak, gives him complications. These two don't blend sweetly. Sweet is not how Schumer wants *Trainwreck* to go down. She wants to explode rom-com clichés and replace them with something fierce and ready to rumble. Done.



Hader gets cuddly with Schumer in *Trainwreck*

Night of the Living Dread

French director brings terror to the streets of Belfast

By Michael Adams

'71

Jack O'Connell

Directed by Yann Demange

★★★★



Judging by this debut, you'll be seeing a lot more from Yann Demange. Channeling classic *The Battle Of Algiers*, the French-born director's gritty action film will have you bolt upright

on the couch.

After a street riot turns ugly in 1971 Belfast, young British soldier Gary Hook is separated from his unit and hunted by the IRA through the nighttime city streets. As if that wasn't terrifying enough, when he witnesses undercover British agents providing Protestants with a bomb, his own superiors decide he's better off dead.

Scripted by Scottish playwright Gregory Burke, who wrote the acclaimed Iraq drama *Black Watch*, '71 confidently explicates the confused politics of Ireland dur-



HARD DAY'S WORK
Jack O'Connell
embarks on 24
hours in hell.

ing "the troubles" without taking sides. The emphasis here is on one man's desperate bid for survival. Jack O'Connell – best known as the lead in *Unbroken* – is terrific in a role that's light on dialogue and long on tense silences. Gary is our stand-in – he's simply an everyman, dropped into a hostile environment, traumatised by what he's witnessed, scared of violence and sickened when he has to perpetrate it.

As good as O'Connell is, '71 belongs to its director. Yann Demange turns Belfast's firelit streets into a menacing maze, superbly choreographing suspense and action scenes so we know brutality is coming but not from where. The filmmaker is a John Carpenter fan so it's fitting this comes off like a real-world, serious-minded *Escape From New York*, right down to the spine-tingling soundtrack.



The DUFF

Mae Whitman

Directed by Ari Sandel

★★★

Every teen clique apparently has a "designated ugly fat friend" who makes the rest of the group look hotter. Remarkably, *The DUFF* transcends this irksomely gimmicky concept to become an appealing if never quite hilarious comedy about female self-acceptance and empowerment. While following a familiar path – voiceover narration, an essay question that needs answering, our girl enlisting the hot boy to help her make herself over, homecoming finale – the hugely likeable leads Mae Whitman and Robbie Amell share a chemistry that manages to be more than the sum of their material.



While We're Young

Ben Stiller, Naomi Watts

Directed by Noah Baumbach

★★★★½

Noah Baumbach continues his fascination with white NYC angst in this entertaining if uneven dramedy. Ben Stiller and Naomi Watts are fortysomethings who become infatuated with twentysomething hipsters Adam Driver and Amanda Seyfried. The performers are great, themes about artistic integrity are thought-provoking, generational-clash jokes are accurate and the soundtrack's a winning mix of retro Eighties, modern hippity hop and classical interludes. But while Baumbach pokes fun at Gen X-ers, his dismissal of Gen Y as Tom Ripley-lite fame-whores comes off as curmudgeonly.



Get Hard

Will Ferrell, Kevin Hart

Directed by Etan Cohen

★★½

What's a namby-pamby white corporate douche gonna do when he's sentenced to 10 years in prison? Hire the only African-American man he knows to teach him how to "get hard" and avoid becoming someone's prison bitch. There's no denying racial stereotyping and rape panic are the foundation for this Will Ferrell-Kevin Hart teaming, though *Get Hard*'s self-awareness and soft heart means it gets off without giving offence. But Etan Cohen's comedy stands convicted of a far more serious crime: despite a few laugh-out-loud sequences, it's just not funny or biting enough.



House Of Cards S3

Kevin Spacey, Robin Wright

Created by David Fincher

★★★★

After a sudsy second season, *HOC* comes back strong with President Frank Underwood's White House under assault. His America Works program is opposed by Congress, the Russians mess with his Middle East peace plan, and the Republicans line up to replace him in the 2016 election. Meanwhile, former chief-of-staff and chief-keeper-of-murderous-secrets Doug Stamper is on the outer and dangerously out of control. But the real threat to his power might be much closer to home. Kevin Spacey and Robin Wright's dynamic fascinates in what is a wonderful binge-watch.

KIM KARDASHIAN

[Cont. from 83] says Kardashian, spying a crew member whose exclusive job is to hold up a special lighting panel so that the family looks perfect at all times.

The setup today is Kylie needs furniture for her new house. Does Kim herself have a shopping addiction? “Well, I have a saving addiction right now, so that makes up for it – I put myself on a budget,” she says. “That’s why I started the eBay store a long time ago. I told myself I had to come up with a certain amount of money if I wanted to spend that money for the month. And I still try to keep myself in that budget. I sell stuff I’ve worn, if I don’t archive it.” She adds, somewhat unbelievably, “I try not to shop that much.”

In the furniture store, Kylie and Kris are wandering around endless living-room

setups, discussing getting measurements for a chaise lounge and if small mother-of-pearl and black tables might be cute for Kylie’s new house. Kim slips a microphone under her green dress to join the conversation. “Are you sure you want to go black and white like Mum?” she asks. Kylie plays the typical teenager who dips in and out of attention, sometimes looking at her phone, other times chugging from a water bottle and staring into space. Kris plays the over-excited mum who is watching her almost-grown daughter move into her first home and wants everything to be exactly right. It’s the roles they really inhabit, or so they tell us, and the filming – despite the five or so cameramen, lighting-panel guy and sound folks who trail them as they walk, ducking behind gigantic mirrors and floor lamps in order to make sure a crew member is never in the shot – flows easily.

Kardashian stays only 20 minutes and leaves to see her daughter; North was a little sick yesterday, and she made her special bottles of tea with honey. She’ll go home to her mansion. West is in his home recording studio and asks if Kardashian would come hang out since they didn’t see each other much the day before. “He loves when all the guys are there and they’re talking about things, pop-culture events,” she says. “They have these think sessions where everyone sits and talks and hangs out, talk about theories and so many different things. I’ve learned so much, just culturally.” She’ll go to sleep early, and then the next day do it all again – the makeup, the tweets, the filming, everything that makes her professional and personal life, her human and digital self, the fake and the true, unreal and real, so intertwined and seamless. We’re not done watching yet. 

SUGE KNIGHT

[Cont. from 73] your mouth, or next time I’m gonna pay my shooter [another] 10 grand to raise the barrel.” (Audaciously, Knight sued West for having inadequate security and the loss of a \$135,000 diamond earring; they settled out of court.) And just last year, Knight was shot six times by an unknown assailant at a party thrown by Chris Brown at West Hollywood hot spot 1 Oak the night before the Video Music Awards; Knight recovered but has reportedly suffered from blood clots since the shooting.

The once-untouchable Knight seemed diminished and vulnerable. “You couldn’t have paid nobody back in the day to even look at the dude wrong,” says Jones. With Death Row gone, “he lost his entourage,” says Wright.

KNIGHT’S ONGOING EMBRACE OF the thug life may have destroyed any remaining credibility he had as a businessman. “When it comes to the Piru shit, he should’ve stepped away a long time ago,” says Jones. “Instead, he got neck-deep into it.” With proceeds from Dre’s chart-topping hits a distant memory, and no new breakthrough artists to profit from, Knight has apparently had to find alternative sources of income. “Suge had to go back and adapt to what he knew: going around and getting money from people that he felt owed him,” Wright says. In 2007, when a reporter for *The Washington Post* asked Knight how he still had money, he preferred to evade the answer rather than lie. “I don’t lie,” said Knight. “The only people I lie to are the police.”

(One former Knight associate, however, believes the Death Row boss had unusually close ties with law enforcement. “I always [thought Knight was] an informant,” says Lake. “The FBI knows the hip-hop

industry, entertainment and drugs on the streets are all intertwined, so you can’t find a better informant for the government than Suge Knight – he can infiltrate almost any camp.” Knight’s lawyer Mesereau calls Lake’s assertion “absolute nonsense,” and Jones also disputes the idea: “There’s a code in the streets. If you don’t have real proof, don’t call nobody a rat.”)

Knight does have a giving side that friends say is genuine, even if it sometimes resembles a scene from a Hollywood gangster movie. Crooked recalls Knight spontaneously spending \$30,000 at a Toys R Us and distributing the spoils at a local children’s hospital; on Father’s Day, he’d hire a bus to bring children to visit their incarcerated dads. Passing out turkeys in the hood on Thanksgiving became an annual Death Row tradition, as did Knight’s “Single Mother’s Day” event – where he’d rent out ballrooms in a fancy Beverly Hills hotel for a five-star celebration for single mothers, who would come in from all over greater Los Angeles. And despite conflicts over child support, Michel’le claims Knight is a loving dad to their 12-year-old daughter. “He’s a great father to all his kids,” she says.

He also still inspires loyalty in some former associates. “Quite frankly, with all the headaches that I had with Suge through the years, the good outweighed the bad,” says Wolfson, who now manages Hall and Oates. “I truly owe him a debt of gratitude for actually allowing me to make decisions at the highest level.”

“There were not a lot of people in the music industry hiring guys who’d had brushes with the law back in the day,” says Wright. “He did that. He gave them jobs, he gave them a chance when no one else would. And that’s why he has so much anger – because he feels he’s helped a lot of people. Now all these people have turned their backs on him.”

Meanwhile, Knight’s former circle is debating the outcome of his current situation. “The lowest I can see him getting, realistically, is 20 to 30 years,” says Jones. “Worst-case scenario, he’ll get life. Either way, he’s out of business.”

After hiring and firing a number of lawyers in rapid succession – including Fletcher and, for a brief reunion, Death Row’s infamous legal *consigliere* in the Nineties, David Kenner – Knight has recently retained the powerful Mesereau, who successfully defended Michael Jackson in his 2005 child-molestation case and has represented controversial figures ranging from Mike Tyson to actor Robert Blake. “I am convinced of Knight’s innocence, and I am convinced these cases should not have been filed. I look forward to defending him,” Mesereau told *ROLLING STONE*. “All I am going to say at this point is that he was defending himself at all times, and should not be facing any charge of murder, attempted murder or hit-and-run. If I had been driving the truck, I would not even have been charged with a misdemeanor. And as far as his robbery case goes, it’s utterly ridiculous.”

As many of his associates have noted, Knight has gotten out of seemingly impossible situations before. “I still consider Suge a friend, but I can’t deal with that nigga – he’s crazy,” says Wright. “He’s been knocked out three or four times, and he’s still walking and talking like he’s the baddest brother around. He’s got some wiggle room, though. Don’t count him out yet.”

“The Suge Knight story has twists and turns, don’t it?” Crooked says. “We don’t have any clue how it will end. He seems to think that he’ll be back on the streets.”

Crooked goes on to relate a story about the day that Knight turned himself in to police.

“He was smoking a cigar, and he put it up in a tree,” says Crooked. “Then he said, ‘I’ll get back to that.’” 

UP IN THE AIR

[Cont. from 89] website search results are incomplete and misleading. Hans, a baby-faced linebacker from Minnesota, explains the finer points of gaming customer-service agents to accrue credit-card points. A Russian-born math-professor-turned-finance teaches Manufacture Spend. A dishevelled former White House staffer leads a seminar titled simply “Hacking United”. “This is their Game Boy,” says Petersen, one of the Hobby’s founding fathers, of the younger recruits enchanted by Schlappig’s success. “They don’t play World of Warcraft – they figure out how to do mileage runs.”

The darker element of the Hobby is said to network at these events. If you have the skills, you may get an invitation to join one of the bands that operate anonymously around the world. These groups use secure servers and private e-mail groups to communicate. “There’s one that I’m on,” says Gary Leff, referring to an online group, stressing that he joined only to monitor the chatter. “Others I’ve had access to don’t know.” Schlappig for a time practiced Manufacture Spend, but, perhaps still haunted by United, he’s decided that anything riskier lies beyond the pale. “Some of it’s the shadiest stuff I’ve ever seen,” he tells me. “That’s why I don’t do a lot of this crap anymore.”

In multiple interviews, airline representatives insist that Schlappig and Flyer-Talk represent little more than a portal for passionate customers. But mention the Hobby’s darker side, and they turn grave. “If any members of these groups were particularly effective, they could have a catastrophic effect on an airline,” says Jonathan Clarkson, director of Southwest Airlines’ rewards program.

Ever since the Skiplagged lawsuit, a new perception has grown that it might be airlines, and not Hobbyists, that are in over their heads. If true, it’s a development that wouldn’t lack for poetic justice, says Tim Wu, a professor at Columbia Law School and a frequent writer on airline policy. Before deregulation, the price for a given seat remained fixed. But today, says Wu, the range of prices that customers might get charged for the very same seat is spectacularly wide. “They made a normal activity suddenly like going to a casino,” he says. “A lot of people get shafted. But it also creates an opportunity for people who can break the system and live like Schlappig. They’re chasing around these people who are trying to game a system that they themselves set up.”

IT’S AFTER MIDNIGHT IN DOWNTOWN Hong Kong, and after crossing the Pacific on another 16-hour flight, raccoon-eyed and hair mussed, Schlappig looks like he was just let out of school for the day. He’s riding a buzz equal parts champagne and coffee, and he has found

himself in his favourite city once again. Tonight, a cab has dumped him curbside at the five-star Hong Kong Hyatt. “There’s something indescribable in the air here,” he murmurs. “You’ll catch on to it.”

Schlappig has barely stepped off the elevator into the hotel’s glistening VIP lounge when someone shouts, “Is that who I think it is?” Two stout men and a blonde see a beaming Schlappig heading toward them, all hugs and first names. In the Hobby, a run-in like this is an occasion for yet another bottle of champagne.

One hour in, and the three are swapping stories about the time they met the teenage Schlappig at a Hobby party he organised in Sausalito, California. The woman at the table is a corporate lawyer from New York, one of the Hobby’s few females. “I met him, and I was like, ‘Oh, my God,’” she recalls. “‘This kid is, like, in high school.’” Each person at the table has concocted a story for their co-workers or friends about where they disappear to on weekends. But this evening, they’ve found one another in the Hong Kong night. Schlappig spills champagne on himself as he raises his glass for a toast: “So much for lonely, right?”

The next morning, Schlappig is fighting off a hangover as he trudges through Hong Kong International for a flight to Jakarta. He sighs. “I don’t really physically associate anything with being home,” he says, “but this is about as close as it gets.” Bag in tow, he pauses to gaze at the sprawling indoor pavilion. “The Hong Kong airport, the Virgin Atlantic Clubhouse at JFK – I do feel at home there,” he muses. “It’s weird.” Soon, it will be a year since he gave up his apartment in Seattle. He ponders the thought with a glass of white wine somewhere over the Indian Ocean, but for the first time he betrays a note of sadness in his blank smile. “Absolutely, it’s isolating,” he admits. “There are nights where it’s 3 a.m. in Guangzhou, China, and you’re like, ‘Oh, I could actually be in L.A. having fun with friends.’ And there’s nothing to do here.”

Or anywhere: His trip reports betray a theme, in photo after photo entirely devoid of human companionship: empty lounges, first-class menus, embroidered satin pillows – inanimate totems of a five-star existence. On our next flight, a seven-hour run from Jakarta International to Tokyo, Schlappig tries to get himself motivated about the champagne selection, holding forth on the best meal pairings with a \$200 bottle of Krug. But there are no fans waiting to surprise him here. An elderly Japanese couple sleep in the corner. Otherwise, the cabin is deserted. Many air carriers long ago made the judgment to let first-class suites go unfilled, at the risk of tainting the marketable aura of exclusivity.

“I do what I love,” Schlappig whispers, perhaps more to himself, trying not to wake the couple. “You have to understand: This has always been my passion.” His words trail off, and he closes his eyes.

“Being in your twenties is hard – being a gay guy in your twenties is even harder,” says Nick Dierman, a close friend of Schlappig and a fellow Hobbyist. “Life’s a challenge. I think this is his way of escaping it.” Some of his friends have floated the idea that Ben should become a lawyer. “Why do that?” he asks, more than slightly annoyed. “Why would I want to sit in an office all day when I can just fly around the world?”

By the time the plane touches down in Tokyo, Schlappig has been in seven countries in seven days. He scoops his things and drifts wordlessly to the exit. It’s still dark outside at Tokyo Narita Airport, and at this hour the palace-size structure is nearly empty. A woman sleeps at a McDonald’s table, head back and mouth open, the faint echoes of a vacuum cleaner whirring in some far-off corridor.

In three hours, he’ll be on a flight bound for the States, and to his dismay he finds the VIP lounge still locked. With a pout, he plops down among the waiting area’s bleak cookie-cutter chairs. Assuming the death of the Hobby doesn’t prove imminent, Schlappig repeatedly insists that his life can go on forever this way. But he also announces, genuinely, that he wants to settle down one day. “That’s exactly what he wants to do,” says Pourazari. “But he can’t. He doesn’t know how.”

Passing the time here in the dark morning contrasts starkly with the most cherished thrill of his life in first class: After the champagne bottles are empty, he’ll be struck with the sudden urge to return to New Delhi. There, tucked in a corner of Indira Gandhi International Airport, he’ll find a perch and study the arrivals hall. “You see a whole family, 20 people, picking up someone at the airport,” he says. “People with signs, people with balloons, with flowers. There’s something beautiful about that.” He’ll watch for a few hours, pondering the stories behind the reunions and the cries of laughter that come with each new flight. But he still can’t decide if what he’s just seen is a vision of his past or the future.

“The world is so big. I can keep running,” Schlappig says. “At the same time, it makes you realise the world is so small.” After a long pause, he continues, “I want what I can’t have. There’s nothing gratifying about that. It’s crazy, and it’s fucked up. I’d still like to think I’m a reasonably happy person.” He grins. “Despite all that.”

Soon, a message comes over the PA system in muffled Japanese. He leaps to his feet, still the 10th-grader at the bell, transfixed once more by the prospect of escaping for the weekend and exploring the world. Schlappig angles through the terminal, the low purr of his rolling carry-on resounding across the cages of an empty bazaar. He’s picking up the pace now, bounding down the empty hallway, ready to take off. At sunrise, the shops will reopen, the terminal will roar back to life. But by then, he will be gone.

Tex Perkins

Warning: do not get between the formidable frontman and his antique vases

By Rod Yates

The last time I swore at the telly

Every time I see our Prime Minister, Tony Abbott. The Conservative side of politics has had some cold-hearted tiny-minded arseholes over the years, but there's never been anyone like our Tony. The swear words are usually euphemisms for some kind of genitalia, ending in "unt" or "rick". I feel physically violated whenever I see him, as if someone has squirted vinegar in my eyes. Hate is not a strong enough word.

The last time someone was rude to me

Was on the internet, of course. Where every asshole gets to express every tiny little thought and opinion they have.

The last thing I do before going onstage

Take a piss.

The last thing I do before going to sleep

Take a piss.

The last time I was embarrassed

The other night I was on stage with Charlie [Owen], we were doing our duo thing, and he comes to my side of the stage, leans in and whispers, "Tex, your fly's open." "Oh shit," I said, "how long has it been that way?" "I dunno," he said, "someone in the audience just told me." I was a little rattled but not devastated. I've done a lot worse. Ten years ago I was on stage in Newcastle. At the end of the fourth song I notice this guy making his way through the audience as he comes to the front of the stage, directly in front of me. He looks up at me and I lean down to hear him say, "Your dick is hanging out."

The last time I got a haircut

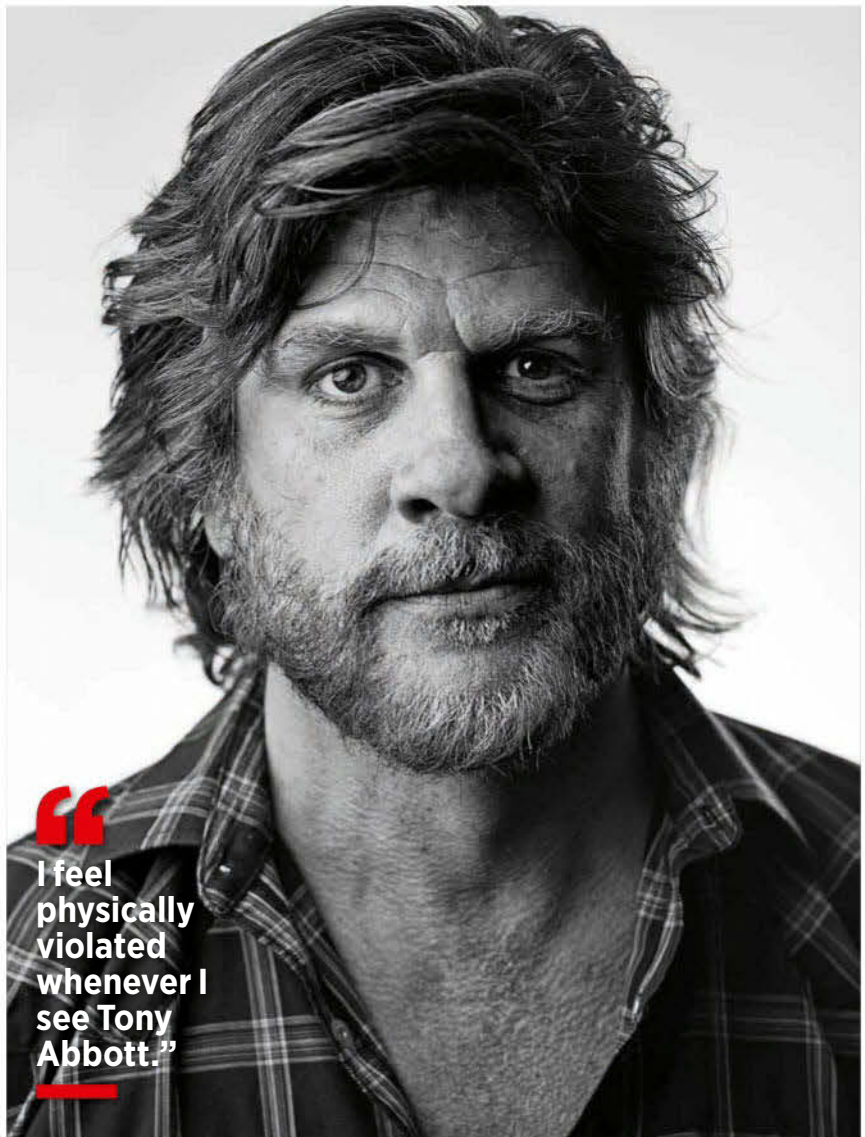
I did it myself.

The last time I said never again

Was the last time I cut my own hair.

The last time I prayed

The last time I remember praying was when I was about 10 years old. There was a raffle at my school and the prize was a set of very lovely antique glass vases. I wanted to win them for my mother. So over the next four weeks I bought tickets whenever I could scrape together a few coins, and I prayed my little arse off! Every spare waking moment was devoted to begging God to let this happen! Eventually the big day when they were drawing the raffle arrived. We all stood



I feel physically violated whenever I see Tony Abbott."

at assembly as they drew out the winning ticket . . . It was me! I'd won! Now my mother might tell you that this is proof that God exists and is listening to our prayers. Others might say that this is the power of positive thinking, and that that much mental energy can manifest reality. But really I was probably the only kid that bought a ticket in that raffle and gave a shit about those antique vases.

The last time I was star-struck

Was a few months ago in the Perth Virgin lounge. I sat down with my chicken noodle soup, looked up and noticed Barry Humphries sitting a few tables away. I

love Barry. I wanted to launch myself over there and tell him that I think he is the greatest living Australian. In my head I began preparing a speech were I thanked him for all the laughs, all the wit and intelligence, for single-handedly saving Australia's reputation overseas, thank him for Les Patterson, for Dame Edna . . . I was going to lay quite a heavy deal on him. Then he got up and walked out. Lucky him.

The last record I bought

It was Beck's *Morning Phase*. Pretty fucking good! Deliberately, unrepentantly slow, sad and sweet.

The last film I saw

Was on an aeroplane. It was *Chappie*, directed by Neill Blomkamp. It's a futuristic dystopian fable set in Johannesburg. I liked it, and was pleasantly surprised to find Die Antwoord not only on the soundtrack but actually in the movie. 

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